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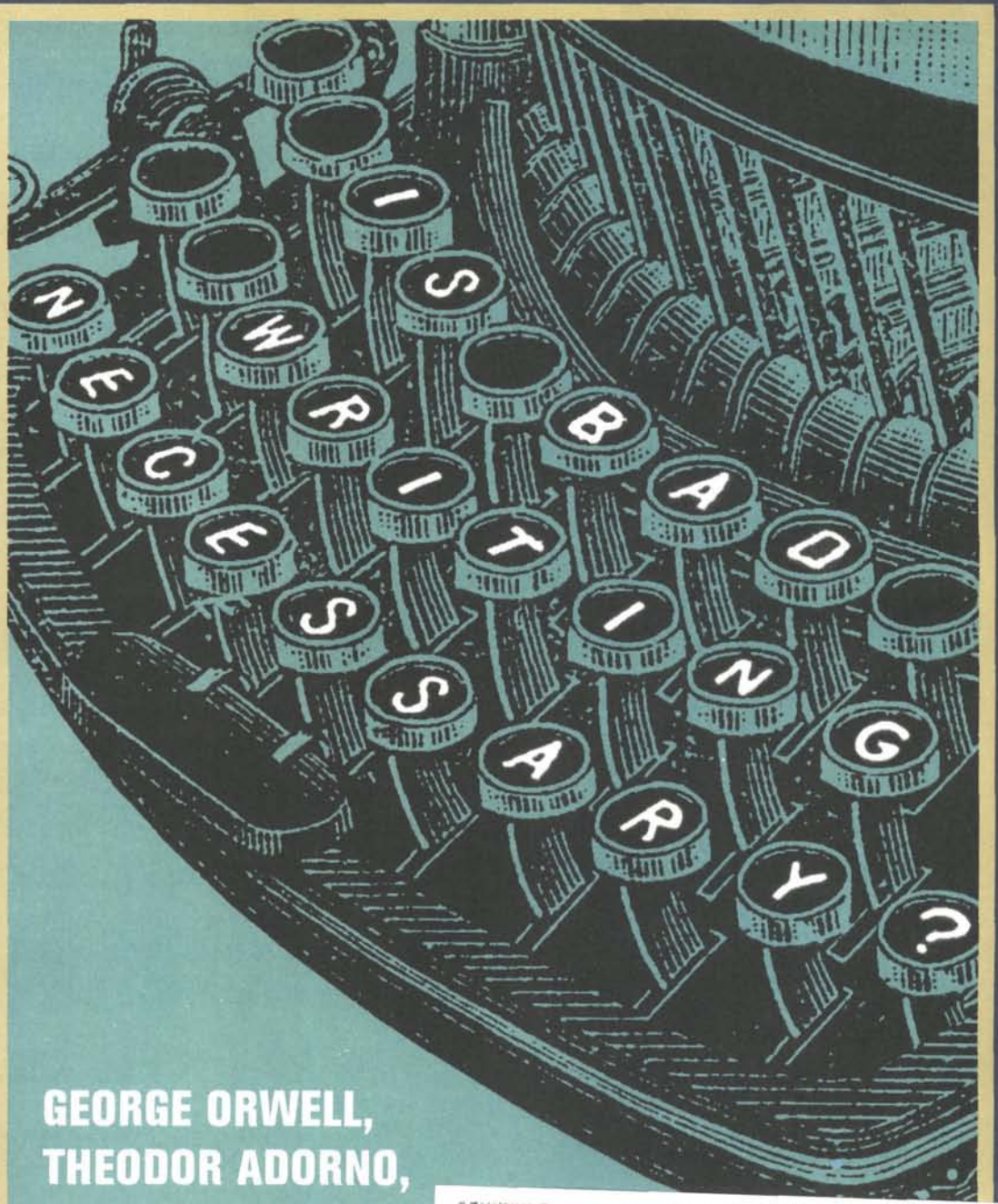

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BY JAMES MILLER

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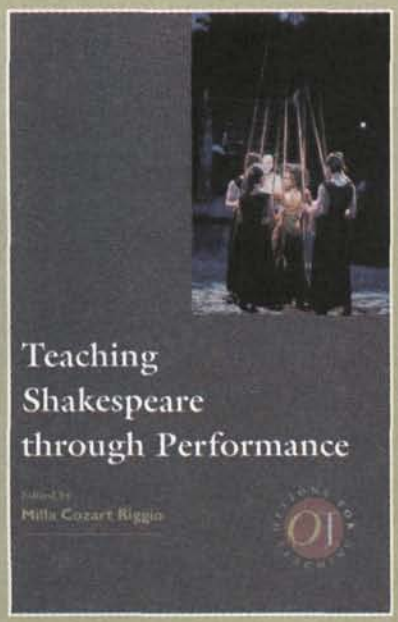

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This volume, designed for teachers of both high school and college English courses who wish to introduce performance strategies into their classroom, is the fourteenth in the MLA series Options for Teaching. Its thirty-one essays deal with the differences between Elizabethan and twentieth-century theater; suggest various workshop exercises, games, and techniques; relate the different experiences of teachers; discuss the use of film, television, and the Internet; and provide a guide to American Shakespeare festivals with academic affiliations, a survey of recent teaching editions of Shakespeare, and a list of available videotapes.

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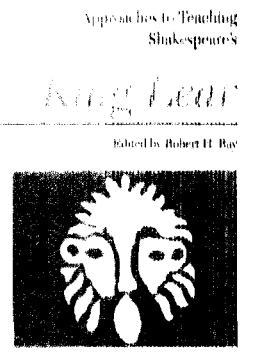
Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's *King Lear*

edited by Robert H. Ray

Perhaps Shakespeare's greatest play, *King Lear* is likely the one most often taught at the undergraduate level, but many instructors agree that it may also be the most daunting to teach. A survey conducted for this collection of essays found several common difficulties teachers face in presenting the play: the inability of students to empathize with an old man, bewilderment caused by the pessimistic vision of the play and its ending, difficulty in conveying the universality of the play, and confusion over complex imagery. *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's* King Lear suggests ways that teachers can meet these challenges and make *King Lear* engaging and accessible.

The volume, like others in the MLA's Approaches to Teaching World Literature, is divided into two parts. The first part, "Materials," surveys the editions of *King Lear* most used by instructors, lists recommended readings for students and teachers, and discusses audiovisual materials available for classroom use. In the second part, "Approaches," sixteen teachers share ideas for teaching *King Lear* in different settings, from freshman survey courses to seminars devoted entirely to the play. The essays present overviews of the play from a variety of critical perspectives as well as describe specific approaches, such as focusing on theme and character, discussing dramatic and philosophical contexts, and analyzing the roles of the written text and of oral and visual performance.

"If you teach King Lear, *you must have this book and you can use most, if not all, of the varied advice these teachers offer."* —Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance



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Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Other Late Romances

edited by Maurice Hunt

This collection of essays, the second Approaches volume devoted to Shakespeare, covers four of the Bard's later plays: *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *Pericles*. Developed from a survey of ninety-three faculty members who teach these romances, the volume presents both practical and imaginative approaches to presenting the works in the classroom.

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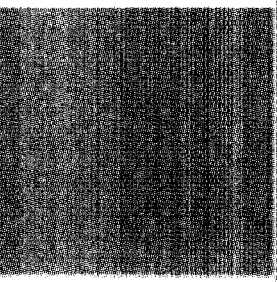

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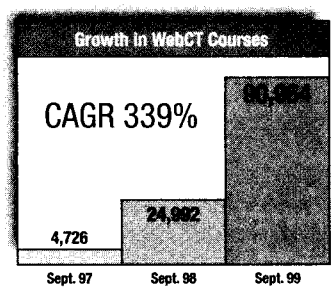

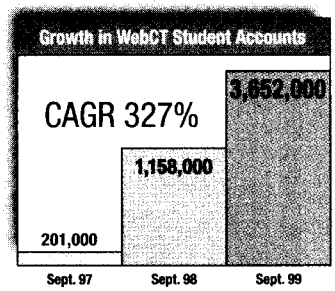

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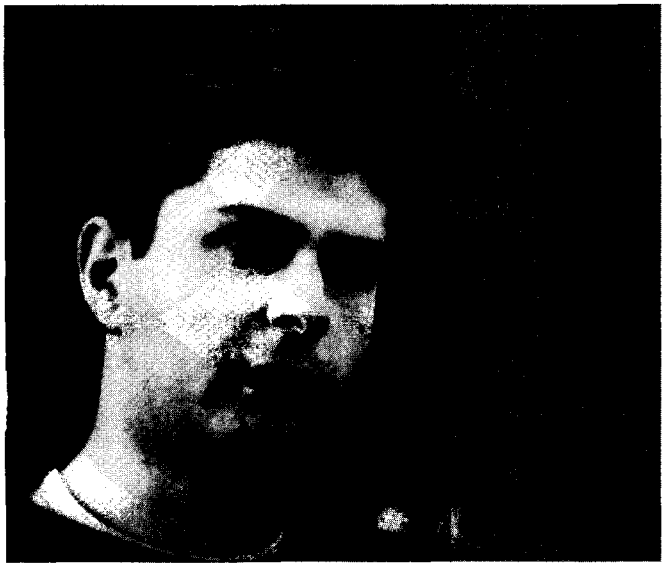

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With their frank indebtedness to Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty, postmodernist theologians are troubling the waters of the evangelical academy. Is deconstruction the last best hope of traditional Protestantism? Or, as its critics charge, just one more sign that evangelical colleges have become too liberal, too secular, and too worldly?
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Who says that rational choice theory is only for the cold of heart? Dissatisfied with accepted theories of decision making, the "revisionist rationalists" believe that human cooperation, commitment, and rule following can be shown to obey the iron laws of the instrumental calculus. Have they solved reason's most intractable riddles? Or have they merely changed the rules of the game?
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Last July, the iconoclastic German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk suggested that only genetic engineering could realize the idealistic aspirations of humanism. After a pause, the German press erupted in controversy this fall as intellectuals rushed to take sides on Sloterdijk's "dangerous thinking." Was there really something else at stake?
BY ANDREW PIPER

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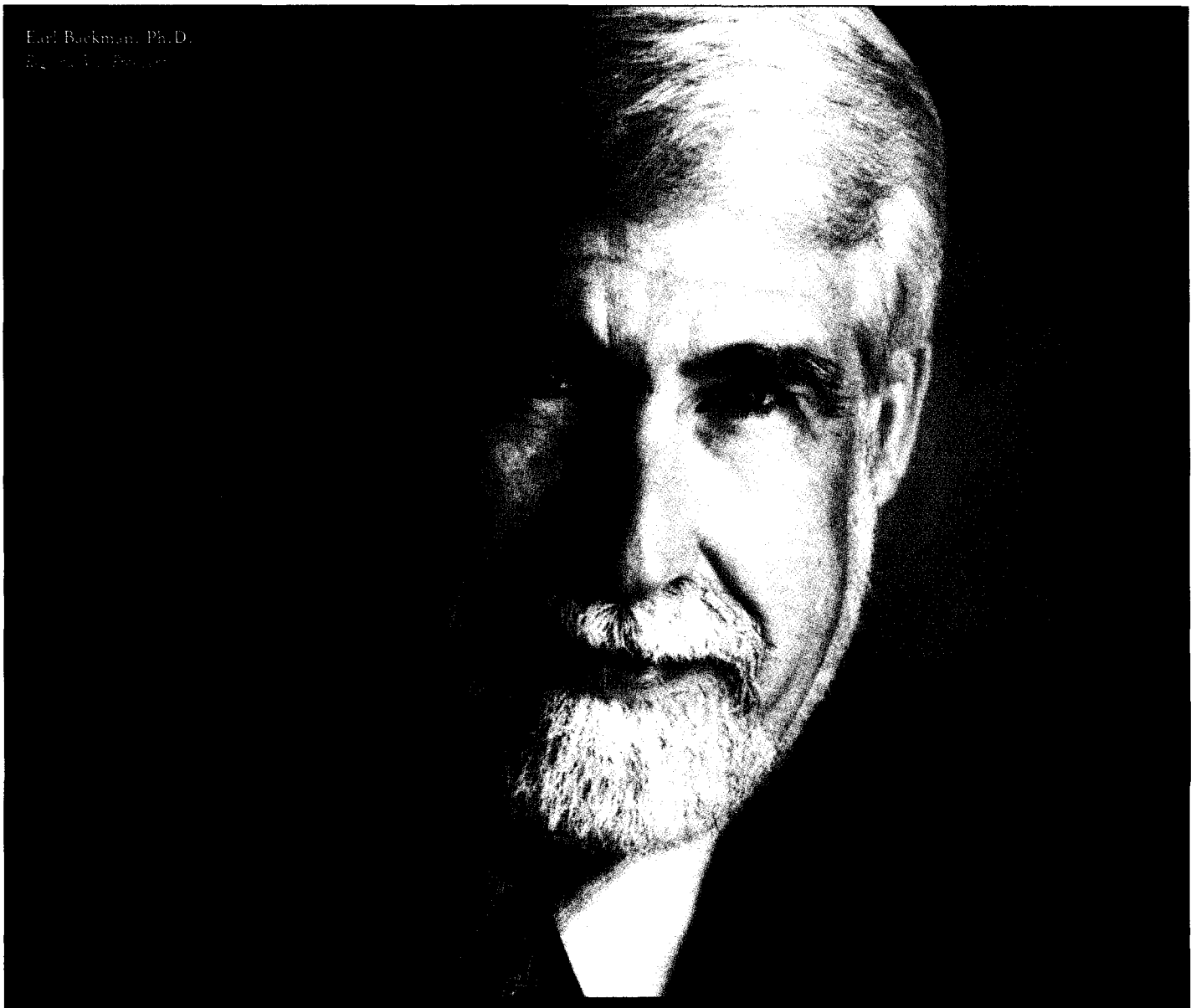

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SECULAR SUSPICIONS

Two thoughts in response to Emily Nussbaum's fine article on secular humanism, "Faith No More" [October].

First, in answering her own question as to whether organized atheism should be regarded as "religion in disguise," Nussbaum is surely right to observe that "if rituals and shared values define a religion, everything from Chicago Cubs fans to the Republican Party would qualify." However, the atheist organizations that she profiles share quite a bit more than rituals and values: They appear to share a strictly naturalistic cosmology, a fairly specific definition of ethical behavior, and a clearly defined view of the meaning of human life. These groups are not meant merely to provide fellowship; they are designed to promote a particular mode of thinking and specific beliefs about the nature of the universe and the ultimate destiny of humankind. If that's not religion, what is?

Second, could we abandon the use of "free thought" as a synonym for "atheistic thought"? Atheists and believers both subscribe to unprovable positions, and excessive dogmatism can lead both groups to an unhealthy narrowness of inquiry. Freedom of thought is hardly the exclusive province of the unbeliever.

RICK ANDERSON
Head Acquisitions Librarian
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

As a self-described Christian intellectual (and graduate student in English), I read "Faith No More" with great curiosity and interest, only to find that the attitudes of many of those interviewed seem as simple-minded as the Christian fundamentalism they condemn. Spiritual belief, intellectual life, and the intersection of the two are more complicated than either atheistic "freethinkers" or religious "fundamentalists" acknowledge. Religious belief does not preclude a healthy intellectual life or social tolerance, activism, and awareness: In fact, as Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., and countless civil-rights leaders have demonstrated, it is often the first step in that direction.

Yes, Christians who ban books, hang the Ten Commandments on courtroom walls, and bay about "Godless liberals" are ridiculous and dangerous, whether they sit in Congress, on school boards or on judicial benches. But the anti-intellectualism and anti–secular humanist rhetoric of many religious groups cannot and should not be taken as a sign that faith inevitably paralyzes the intellect, just as the flagrant overstatements of many "freethinkers" quoted in the article should not belie the intellectual effort of many in the secular humanist movement.

AMY E. WELDON
Department of English
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Caleb Crain's overheated, innuendo-ridden rhetoric ["Infidelity," October] boils down to an indictment of Milan Kundera for presuming, while he still lives, to improve the translations of his own novels and an indictment of me, a "high-profile...mystery man," for disfiguring *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and *Farewell Waltz* with my new translations of them. I'm astonished that anyone would question an author's right to see to it that his work is presented to the public as he sees fit. I'm equally surprised (though pleased) to see that Crain, having no doubt combed all 590 pages of these two books, could find only ten debatable "errors" to charge me with.

May I, in turn, merely cite one instance sadly typical of Crain's methodical animus? He quotes an author's note by Kundera: "I was all the more unhappy because I did not believe that it was a matter of incompetence on the [original] translator's part, or of carelessness or ill will: no; in good conscience he produced the kind of translation that one might call *translation-adaptation*. Is this the current, normal practice? It's possible. But unacceptable. Unacceptable to me." Crain, to his discredit, mischaracterizes these respectful and reasonable words as "a personal attack."

AARON ASHER
New York, NY

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THE OTHER EVOLUTIONIST

"AT THE END OF A TURBULENT and violent century, neo-Darwinism apparently remains impregnable—much like Communism just prior to its dramatic implosion." So write the latest critics of evolutionary dogma. Is neo-Darwinism about to collapse? Certainly the Darwinian view has had its share of challenges during the past century, and has survived them. This challenge, however, comes from a novel direction.

The molecular immunologist Edward J. Steele, based at the University of Wollongong in Australia, claims to have evidence for a Lamarckian hereditary mechanism. He and his colleagues believe they are on the verge of a revolution, but the old-guard neo-Darwinists aren't having any of it.

The French biologist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck (1744–1829) outlined a theory of evolutionary change in 1809, fifty years before Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. The basic idea was that organisms make biological changes in adapting to their environment and then pass these changes on to their offspring. Since then, Lamarck has been ridiculed for presumably implying that giraffes developed their long necks by stretching, generation after generation, toward the leaves on trees.

Modern biologists are adamant that nothing of the sort occurs, ever. Steele first claimed to have experimental evidence to the contrary back in 1979, when he and his colleague Reginald Gorczynski were visiting researchers at the Ontario Cancer Institute in Toronto. Together, they injected infant male mice with cells from a different group of mice and watched as the infants' immune systems developed a tolerance to the foreign cells. Then they claimed to observe the same tolerance in many of the mice's offspring.

Biologists in Britain were intrigued enough to try to repeat Steele's experiments themselves. Playing the part of the open-minded scientist, Nobel laureate Peter Medawar told the *Sunday Times* of London, "I have no idea what the outcome will be but I hope Steele is right." After an impressive effort, however, these experimenters ended up with very different results. What followed was a classic scientific duel. Steele and Gorczynski claimed the new data were being misread. Medawar's colleague Leslie Brent went another round, this time conducting what a commentator called "one of the most serious attempts I have ever seen to reproduce an experimental protocol in detail." Brent reported negative results again. Each group claimed the other had misinterpreted data and made technical oversights.

Without consistent results, Steele had just a brief time in the spotlight. His claims, however, did draw endorsements from such prominent figures as Arthur Koestler and the philosopher Sir Karl Popper, who picked Steele's small book *Somatic Selection and Adaptive Evolution* as the "most exciting" of 1979. Meanwhile, Steele has continued his work during the past two decades. Most recently, he has co-authored *Lamarck's Signature: How Ret-*

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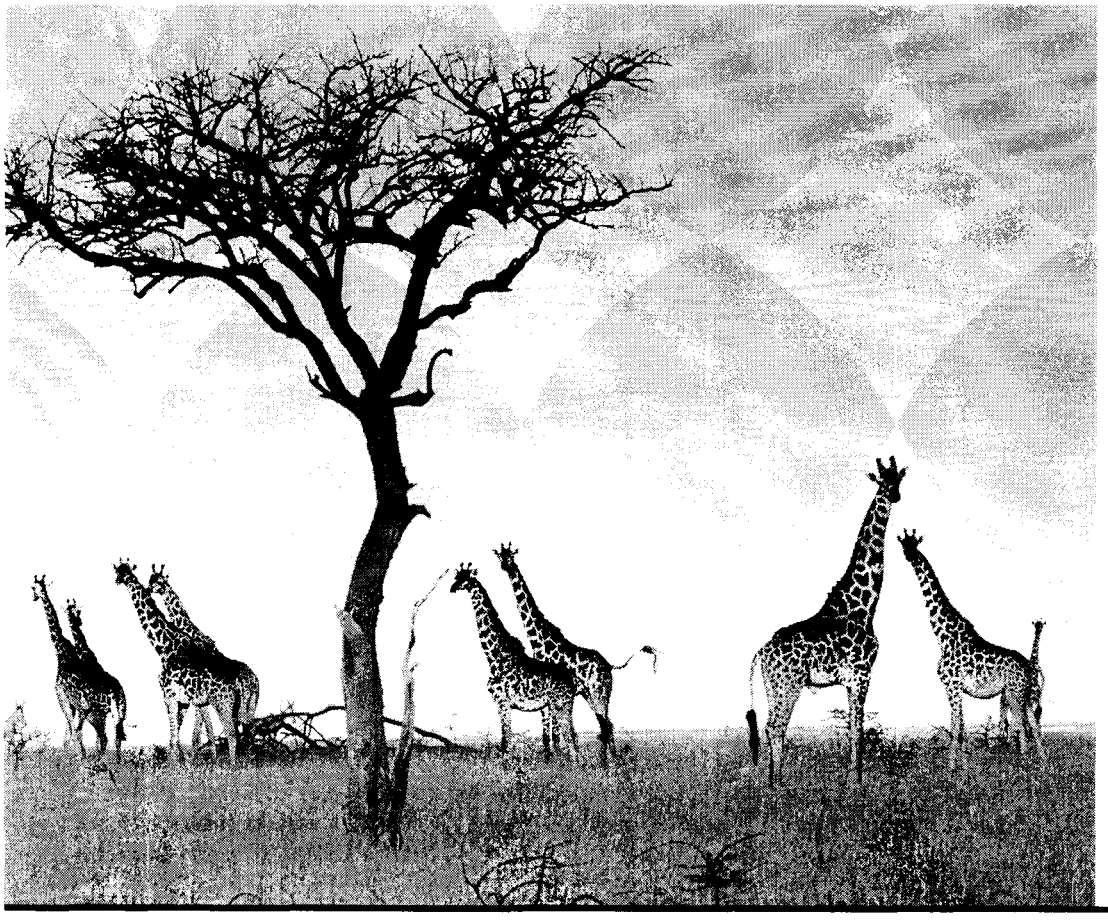
rogenes Are Changing Darwin's Natural Selection Paradigm (Perseus) with fellow immunologist Robert V. Blanden and technology expert Robyn A. Lindley (who has been married to Steele since 1982).

Steele and his colleagues insist their gripe is not with Darwin; in fact, they enthusiastically point out that Darwin himself advocated the existence of a Lamarckian mechanism in tandem with natural selection. If you haven't heard of his "pangenesis" theory, it's probably because contemporary neo-Darwinists have maintained an embarrassed silence about it. Rather than Darwin, it is the German biologist August Weismann (1834–1914) that Steele and company seek to overthrow. In 1885, Weismann proposed that an uncrossable barrier protected reproductive cells from being affected by changes elsewhere in the body (Koestler later referred to it as a "genetic chastity belt"). Weismann famously "proved" his claim by cutting off the tails of several generations of rats to show that their offspring were not born tailless.

In attempting to revive Lamarckism, Steele and his colleagues have focused their attention on the immune system. The immune system is a mini-evolutionary puzzle of its own: How is it that our bodies can quickly respond to so many different kinds of attacks? Is all this information in the genes? If so, then how does our immune system respond to new diseases?

Long ridiculed for its explanation of the giraffe's neck, Lamarckism still finds new and devoted adherents.



Part of the answer comes from the fact that some immune cells contain genes that mutate with unusual frequency. The most common type of mutation is a sort of genetic typo that occurs when a cell's DNA is transcribed into RNA, the molecule that helps to assemble proteins. These mutations allow the immune system to test out different defenses until it finds one that does the job.

Steele notes that the altered RNA might then revert itself back into DNA, picking up more typos along the way. Indeed, such "reverse transcription" of RNA back into DNA has been observed frequently in other contexts. In the immune system, the mutations that lead to success in combating disease will multiply. Thus Steele suggests those same mutations will have the best chance to be transferred via reverse transcription back into DNA.

But the difficult leap for Lamarckians is this: Could this new DNA then be carried to the reproductive genes (in the sperm and egg cells), replace the original DNA there, and so be passed on to an organism's offspring? Steele and company have devised an elegant, but speculative, story to describe how this crossing of Weismann's barrier might happen using known biological mechanisms. In short, they believe a virus could carry the altered DNA to the reproductive cells and replace the DNA in those cells.

Hard-line neo-Darwinists (in other words, most biologists) are not so quick to make this

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leap. They set the bar very high for overturning a central tenet of biology. This strategy is understandable given past attacks on the Darwinian story from creationists and others. And many Darwinians suspect the Lamarckians of harboring a sentimental and unscientific fantasy of overcoming the blind chance involved in evolutionary change. The theory's past associations do little to dispel this worry; at a particularly memorable low point, the Lamarckian Soviet biologist Trofim Denisovich Lysenko coordinated the official arrest and imprisonment of several rival geneticists. Another Lamarckian, the Austrian Paul Kammerer, was accused of doctoring his experimental toads with India ink so that they would appear to have inherited certain telltale characteristics.

But might the neo-Darwinists be skeptical to a fault? Interestingly, Richard Dawkins, neo-Darwinism's most ardent champion, found Steele's work worthy of comment in his book *The Extended Phenotype* (1982). Instead of casting doubt on Steele's hypothesis, Dawkins argues that it is not really Lamarckian at all. "Far from being uncomfortable for neo-Weismannists, it turns out to be deeply congenial to us." Dawkins is not disturbed by the prospect of RNA from the immune system being read into DNA in the reproductive cells. He simply insists that the selection of which mutations get written into the genetic code must occur according to Darwinian principles of undirected trial and error, as Steele agrees is the case within the immune system.

But even if the process Steele and his colleagues describe is possible, does it ever actually occur? Evolutionary mechanisms are never observed directly, so we must make do with circumstantial evidence. Steele and his colleagues claim recently to have found such evidence—a "signature" of past events. It is "written all over the...genes" that carry instructions for immune system responses. They claim that a distinct pattern of mutations concentrated in particular areas of these genes "strongly suggests" that in the past, information from the immune system has been transferred into DNA and in the reproductive organs.

Other biologists are not so easily swayed. Laurence Hurst, a professor of evolutionary genetics at the University of Bath, suggests there may be other, less radical explanations for the pattern of mutations that Steele cites. "I remain to be convinced that Lamarck's signature is not easily mistaken for someone else's," he wrote recently in the *New Scientist*. Moreover, if Steele and his colleagues turn out to be right about the immune system, it is not clear that a similar mechanism operates elsewhere. Organisms may be able to pass on an acquired immune system tolerance to their offspring, but can they pass on anything else? A long neck? A fondness for strawberries?

Nevertheless, Steele and his colleagues have opened up an intriguing area of research. For example, independent of any Lamarckian phenomena, their work may eventually help to explain how the immune system copes with a diverse array of invaders. Blanden admits that "the hard-liners are very unlikely to change." But he and the others believe that young immunologists, whose work does not directly bear on evolution, might be more open minded. Indeed, there is at least some evidence that times may be changing. "I have not been shouted down in a seminar since 1994," says Steele.

MARK PARASCANDOLA

THE VANISHING PROFESSORS

IN THE BAD OLD DAYS OF the USSR, Moscow's formidable Academy of Sciences was an oasis of prestige, power, and privilege. To be inducted into the academy was an honor, a fitting culmination of the most distinguished of scholarly careers. When academy researchers concocted economic policies or space programs, the Kremlin dutifully listened and frequently obeyed. The Soviet authorities showered academicians with then-unimaginable luxuries: chauffeured cars, dachas outside Moscow, money for research trips, and fat salaries. If an academy member wanted sausage, he needn't have joined the masses in Moscow's interminable lines; such delicacies reliably appeared at academy functions.

Now the academy's pedestal—and much of its prestige—has been knocked rudely away. Though members still work from leather-backed chairs and can still—on occasion—summon cars, the pampered life has virtually disappeared. So, too, have salaries: At around $40 or $50 a month for top-level scholars, they are, as the academy economist Lioudmila Anossova confides, "laughable." Researchers squeak by on international grants, payments for journal articles, and lecture fees from Moscow's new private universities.

With salaries scraping the bottom of the barrel, observes Sergei Guriev, a faculty member at the private New Economic School, founded in 1992, the academy has lost its sway with young scholars. "The Academy of Sciences is where young people don't want to go," says Guriev. "Because it's an older place, the older generation stays. The middle generation goes to the West, and the younger generation goes to the private sector." The departmental records tell a similar story: From 1991 to 1996, young researchers fled the academy's economics department, where the average age is now about sixty.

In a higher education system that suffers from a brain drain and chronic financial instability, the academy's predicament is hardly unusual. Indeed, from the look of recent statistics, Russia's entire university system is in imminent danger of extinction. Projections from the Centre for Science Research and Statistics—itself connected to the academy—show an alarming trend: At the current rate the average age of academic doctors—the highest level of educational attainment in Russia—will rise from an already high 59.7 today to 63.5 in 2006. Consider that Russia's life expectancy for men, who dominate the profession, is 57.7. An actuary might justly conclude that the typical life expectancy of a Russian professor is negative two! Meanwhile, the total population of researchers at the university level is rapidly diminishing: It shrank from 38,190 in 1994 to 28,300 in 1998.

Money, predictably, is the root of the problem. Many academics have come to regard their vocation as a hobby; to make ends meet, they take jobs

PREVIOUS PAGE: MARC & EVELYNE BERNHEIM

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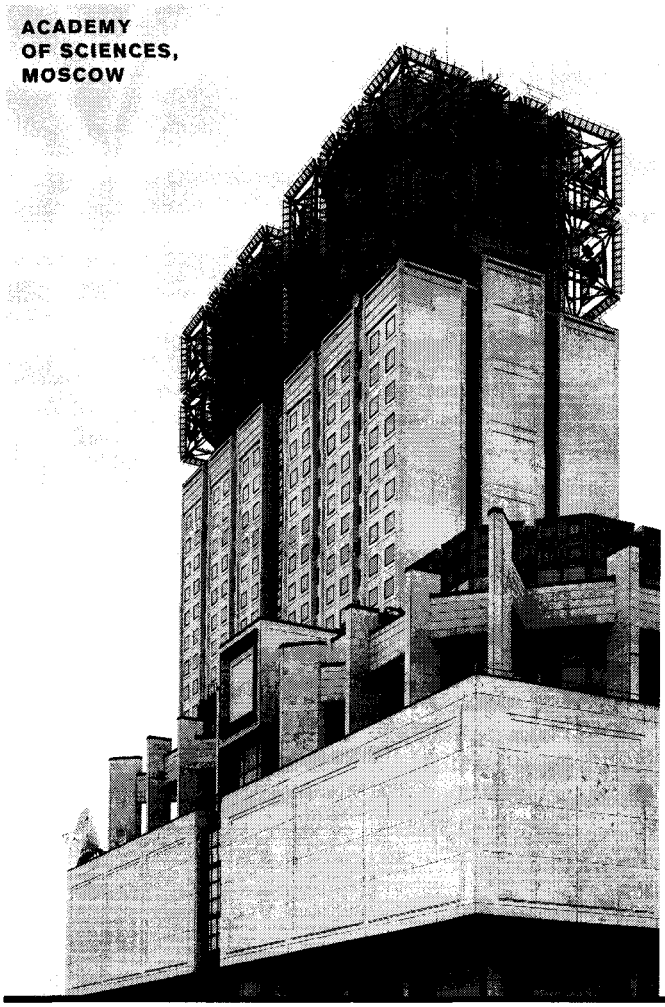
in private labs or businesses. One psychology professor at the state university in Vladimir, a few hours' drive east of Moscow, confesses to giving lectures for $1 apiece at a private institute nearby. And as the money has dried up, the profession has also lost its prestige. Disciplines like history and linguistics, which were honored in the Soviet era, are now shunned as impractical. Concerned about their futures, students swarm to law, economics, international relations, and foreign languages—disciplines that can open doors to Russia's most lucrative professions.

Even if young, would-be professors are not put off by the low salaries (often barely enough to cover the cost of transportation) or by the profession's diminished social status, they still must face a third set of obstacles. The old Soviet infrastructure, as ill suited as it has become to the new Russia, remains oddly intractable. Says Elvira Osipova, an English professor at St. Petersburg State University, "In an ideological department such as philosophy or history, if the same professors who taught the history of the Soviet Union, the history of Marxism and its good uses, and the disappearance of the same—if they remain (and they do remain), can they change their worldview radically? They continue in the old vein, and the general intellectual atmosphere in some departments is... well, I should say, conservative is a mild word for it."

> According to statistics, the average Russian professor has been dead for two years.



ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, MOSCOW

YURI PALMIN

St. Petersburg State University's International Relations Faculty may be a case in point. When the faculty opened in 1994, stocked with ex-Communist professors (at the time, these were the only professors in supply), it was dedicated to providing students with a solid interdisciplinary education in a field of newly heightened relevance. It is, many maintain, a dazzling success, with visiting professors from abroad and graduates moving on to well-paying jobs. Nonetheless, its vice dean, Igor Leshukov, resigned in 1998. The campus, he says, was plagued by a curriculum more "fashionable" than substantive, lecture assignments based not on competence but on personal loyalties, underqualified staff, obtuse patriotism, and bribery so fierce that even students admitted tuition-free often wound up paying $8,000 to get in. (The university denies all of these charges, and the current dean of the faculty claims he barely remembers Leshukov's serving as vice dean.) The common denominator, asserts Leshukov in his quiet, measured voice, is the glacial pace of institutional change. "The system affects everybody who belongs to it," he concludes.

Russia's most ambitious young intellectuals apparently agree: Masses of them have fled to the United States or Europe. Those who return to Russia often do so with caution, taking jobs in Western-funded think tanks or in the smattering of new, grant-funded universities, like the European University in St. Petersburg (where Leshukov now lectures) or the New Economic School in Moscow, which touts itself as "the first non-state graduate school in modern economics in Russia."

But where does this leave Russia's state universities? According to Leshukov, the only faculty willing to endure the old system are those who are also willing to perpetuate it through the familiar games of *blot*, bribery, and connections. If he is right, then the more serious concern is not the extinction of the professorial kind. Rather, it's that too few old-timers are willing to give up their roles in these games to make way for a new generation of scholars.

KATE GALBRAITH

CULT CONTROL

THIS SPRING, FACULTY MEMbers at Maryland's Frostburg State University found themselves confused by a state task force's questionnaire. Though the task force had been asked to study "the effects of cult activities" on campus, its questions didn't specifically mention cults, referring instead to the more amorphous category of harmful "group" activities. The respondents did their best:

"Does this question include hazing?"

"There are nasty remarks and descriptions of activities written on bathroom walls."

"Define 'cult.' Occasionally, I see a pentagon symbol on a building, but I know of no cult problems on campus."

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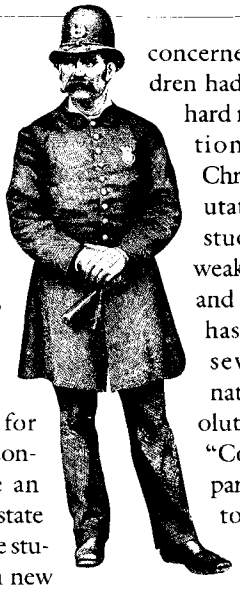
"The Greek system is a cult. No advisee talked to me about the problems directly, however."

The questionnaire was the product of legal tiptoeing, and responses like these showed it. Concerned about First Amendment issues, the state's eighteen-member Task Force to Study the Effects of Cult Activities on Public Senior Higher Education Institutions was trying to gather information about potentially dangerous campus groups without singling out religious organizations for special scrutiny. But with the C-word printed atop each questionnaire in the task force's name, respondents on some campuses inevitably mentioned the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church and the International Churches of Christ. And sure enough, last August, the Unification Church–sponsored International Coalition for Religious Freedom (ICRF) sued the state of Maryland, alleging that the task force violates the U.S. Constitution by favoring "certain religions over other religions." The complaint cited the survey in particular, claiming that it created a "serious chilling effect" on freedom of belief on Maryland campuses.

Protesting the Maryland task force, Stuart asks, "Would we call postmodernism a dangerous cult?"



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Suit co-plaintiff Alex Colvin, a forty-nine-year-old University of Baltimore graduate student, claims that the questionnaire sends faculty the message that they should regard campus religious groups with suspicion: "People are going to get together and say, 'Hey, you know, we've got a kid here who's inviting people to Bible studies, we'd better keep an eye on him.'" Colvin has been a member of the Unification Church for twenty-six years. He considers the task force an explicit attempt by the state of Maryland to regulate students' freedom to join new religions, such as his own.

The task force came into being after lobbying by about a dozen aggrieved parents helped push through a joint resolution at the close of the Maryland State Assembly's 1998 legislative session. Some of the parents were particularly concerned that their children had fallen in with the hard recruiting International Churches of Christ, which has a reputation for requiring students to break or weaken ties with friends and family, and which has been banned on several campuses nationwide. The resolution reads in part: "College students are particularly vulnerable to cult recruitment because they are often grappling with becoming independent, overwhelmed with new responsibilities and relationships, adjusting to new environments, and anxious about their futures." It uses the word "cult" a total of eighteen times, including its stipulation that "parents of current or former cult mem-

BARBARISM AND RELIGION

J. G. A. Pocock

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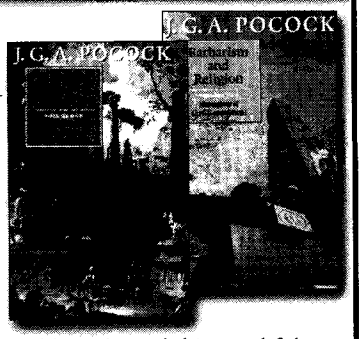

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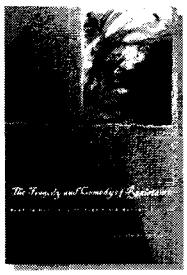

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bers" sit alongside students, state representatives, and university administrators on the task force.

First Amendment groups reacted immediately. "Legally, there's no such thing as a cult," says Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AUSCS), a Washington, D.C.–based watchdog group. "You wonder sometimes what gets in legislators' heads." AUSCS sent a warning letter to Maryland's governor, Parris Glendening, shortly after the legislation enabling the task force was passed. "Such an inquiry lies perilously close, if not over, the constitutionally mandated line between church and state," it read.

But First Amendment rights are not all that's at stake, say others. "You can't just mindlessly say, oh, religion, religion, religion, freedom of religion, we have to turn a blind eye," says the Rutgers sociologist Benjamin Zablocki, who cites rampant sexual abuse and child abuse in some reclusive religious groups he has studied.

It seems clear that only a tiny minority of Maryland students have actually engaged in what the task force considers dangerous group activity. A 1997 survey of the College Park campus found that 35 percent of students had been invited to join groups they considered cults and 21 percent knew someone who had joined such groups; but as for which groups did or did not qualify as cults, the survey left the matter to its respondents' discretion. The task force's final report, released last September, finds involvement in dangerous groups less prevalent than feared. The report observes, however, that in individual cases "harm can be very severe."

Denny Gulick, a mathematician at Maryland's College Park campus who for years has tried to steer students away from organizations like the International Churches of Christ, pulls no punches when describing some groups' coercive recruitment techniques. "They're apt to ask questions to which there is only one legitimate answer," he says: For example, they might ask, "'Which would you rather be doing now, would you rather be studying for your own stupid self, or would you rather be helping the world through God?'" Gulick, who appeared on NBC as a commentator on the Heaven's Gate suicides, has in the past handed out surveys on cult involvement in his calculus classes. He also testified in favor of the formation of the task force in Maryland's House of Delegates.

The College Park anthropologist William Taft Stuart, on the other hand, was the only person to challenge the task-force resolution before it became law. Since then he has mobilized a number of academics for the cause. Stuart parodies the strict emphasis on critical thinking to which Gulick and other task-force supporters often appeal. "What would we do, would we call postmodernism a dangerous cult?" he asks. "Because in many respects, postmodernism is an explicit rejection of the critical faculties that are championed by the Enlightenment, and the Enlightenment indeed is the vision that gave birth to the university."

Jeffrey Hadden, a University of Virginia sociologist, shares Stuart's concerns. Hadden notes that fringe religions "happen to be the subject of hate, of discrimination, of abuse," and he fears that the state task force will make matters worse. For the past several months, he has maintained an extensive Web site on the Maryland task force, archiving its proceedings and posting academic essays, including his own highly critical remarks. If the committee and its supporters are really as concerned as they say they are about groups that keep students away from their studies, Hadden quips, they should take a closer look at college sports.

Having fulfilled its mandate, the task force has disbanded, leaving behind a twenty-page report that recommends a variety of cult-awareness programs and services, including resource centers to disseminate information and track group-related complaints. The controversy, however, is far from over. The International Coalition for Religious Freedom's challenge might well block implementation of the task force's recommendations and prevent other states from following Maryland's model. And the coalition has brought in one of the heaviest hitters of the "cult wars" as its lead attorney: Kendrick Moxon, a Scientology lawyer who defeated and bankrupted the Cult Awareness Network in a major 1995 lawsuit.

Whatever the outcome of this highly charged legal battle, it certainly won't bring the two polarized camps—the "anti-cultists" and the "cult apologists," in the time-honored lingo of the cult wars—much closer. Yet the two sides do occasionally meet in a vague ideological middle. "Sometimes, some interactions between some people in some groups cause harm," concedes the co-plaintiff Alex Colvin. "I don't think anybody could argue with that—and that applies to all groups."

CHRIS MOONEY

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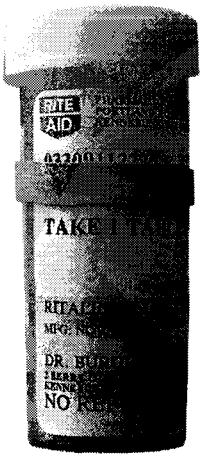

THE TROUBLE WITH NORMAL

SIGMUND FREUD ONCE SUGgested that pathology was most interesting for what it revealed about society as a whole. While the heyday of psychoanalysis may have come and gone, Freud's desire to attribute broad cultural meanings to the unique psychic disturbances of the moment still thrives: We've all heard the claims that attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Ritalin are merely the inevitable by-products of a culture addicted to speed—to cellular phones and e-mail, to five-second sound bites and music videos that splice together images at hundredth-of-a-second intervals. But according to Ken Jacobson, a doctoral candidate in anthropology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, American children's hyperactivity may tell us a lot less than we expected.

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Jacobson has just completed the first cross-cultural anthropological study of ADHD, not to mention the first to employ research techniques usually used on apes. His conclusion? ADHD kids and normal kids are not all that different. "I think the default condition of children is to be talking, moving around, and fooling around, all the classical ADHD-type behaviors," says Jacobson. "If you're predisposed to label *any* child as ADHD, the distracted troublemaker or the model student, you'll find a way to observe these behaviors. And if you're predisposed not to find it, then you'll find ways of overlooking these behaviors."

Using animal-research techniques that are designed to measure the presence or absence of particular behaviors with great objectivity, Jacobson observed a group of "normal" English schoolchildren (children who had not been diagnosed with ADHD or any other learning or behavioral disorders) over randomly selected, fifteen-second intervals. He monitored their behavior against a checklist that included thirty-five activities such as "giggling," "squirming," and "blurting out." When Jacobson repeated this study on three English schoolchildren who *had* been diagnosed with ADHD, he found no significant differences whatsoever. "In both groups, you'd have kids exhibiting concentration, alertness, and control at certain moments and restlessness, inattention, and defiance at others," remarks Jacobson, who released the results of his research at the American Anthropological Association's conference in November.

The debate over ADHD—biological reality or social construction? legitimate learning disability or cultural artifact?—is one of the most talked about in science and education today. It was roughly five years ago that ADHD began to attract widespread public attention, coincident with the publication of the first research suggesting that the disorder might have isolable biological or even genetic components. In 1995 neurobiologist P.O. Quinn identified a mechanism that linked ADHD hyperactivity to a particular sort of neurobiological malfunctioning. Not long afterwards, Joseph Biederman of the Massachusetts General Hospital found that this mechanism was related, in part, to an unusual gene overwhelmingly present in families with a history of ADHD.

Nevertheless, these early studies, with their heavy emphasis on brain chemistry and genetics were anything but conclusive, and criticism was quick to follow. Among the most prominent voices of this backlash were those of the pediatricians Lawrence H. Diller, author of *Running on Ritalin* (Bantam, 1998), and neurologist Sydney Walker, author of *The Hyperactivity Hoax* (St. Martin's, 1998). Both authors argued that the tendency to portray ADHD as a purely "biological" condition, and Ritalin as its "cure," had more to do with culture and politics than with science. An even more radical voice entered the fray when the psychology professor Richard DeGrandpre suggested in his book *Ritalin Nation* (Norton, 1999) that ADHD's prevalence might simply be the by product of a cultural emphasis on speed.

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Jacobson is quick to situate his research within this tradition of skepticism about science: "Neuroscience is very young," he insists, "and at this point, I'm still not sure it 'knows' anything—about ADHD or anything else."

Jacobson believes his own study lends credence to the claim that ADHD is culturally specific rather than biologically produced. He points out that in the United Kingdom, less than 1 percent of elementary school students are currently diagnosed with ADHD. On the other hand, estimates for the diagnosis's prevalence in the United States are closer to 3 to 5 percent, and *The Hyperactivity Hoax* asserts that more than 10 percent of elementary school–age boys are on drugs like Ritalin. In Jacobson's view, at least part of this discrepancy can be explained by the fact that the British have a more liberal definition of "normal" than do Americans—one more accepting of hyperactive behavior at certain times and in certain places. Jacobson notes that in the United Kingdom, teachers and educational experts prefer to adopt looser diagnostic categories, such as Emotional and Behavioral Difficulty (EBD), for problem children. The English "don't consider EBD clinical," says Jacobson, "but behavioral, and something you can correct through discipline."

Jacobson concludes that ADHD kids are not so different from their peers.

The worst thing about America's ADHD fixation, say critics like Jacobson, is that it skews the distribution of educational resources. The United States spends close to $9 billion each year on learning-disabled students. This sum is more than four times what was spent last year on federal Head Start programs. Such disparities become particularly hard to defend in light of recent research indicating that Ritalin can improve *anybody's* concentration, and that many of the educational luxuries given to dyslexic and ADHD students can benefit *all* mediocre students, including those who are not learning disabled.

What's more, even among children diagnosed with ADHD, inequalities abound. The Office of Civil Rights in New York City charges that learning-disabled minorities are usually warehoused in Special Ed programs. Meanwhile wealthier parents manage to parlay ADHD diagnoses into the obtaining of special amenities for their children. Pundit Mary Eberstadt calls special treatment for children with ADHD "affirmative action for affluent white people."

Is there a better way to handle ADHD children? While that debate is likely to continue for some time, Jacobson is more concerned about how we should handle those children *not* diagnosed with learning disabilities: "I think we really need to think about...the policies and programs that will bring out the talents and deal with the needs of every child instead of saying, 'Let's focus on the deviations from the norm and just not worry about everybody else.'" In short, he proposes that we address the long-ignored pathology of simply being "normal."

JASON SHOLL

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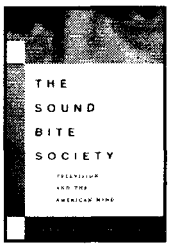

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Stephen Ferry, photojournalist and author of *I Am Rich Potosì: The Mountain That Eats Men* (Monacelli, 1999).

"The experience of reading **Steve Lehman's** ***The Tibetans: A Struggle to Survive*** (Umbrage, 1998), a rare eyewitness report from inside the Chinese colony of Tibet, is at once informative and immediate. While it is a photo book, it should be read from beginning to end, because, for all its wild graphic gestures, it is highly structured. The book first plunges us into the heart of the conflict, then secretes us behind Chinese lines on a tense tour of occupied Tibet, and finally arrives, with much of the Tibetan population and its spiritual leadership, in Dharamsala, India, the Tibetans' place of exile. Much of this is ground first broken, at considerable personal danger, by Lehman himself. The dramatic front section, for instance, takes place in 1987 in Lhasa, where Buddhist monks and nuns rioted, only to be met with a violent Chinese reaction. Lehman alone managed to get these images out of Tibet and onto the world's front pages.

"Lehman presents complex collages made up of artifacts from his trips; he scrawls graffiti on his pictures; he shifts format abruptly from chapter to chapter, ranging from 35 mm color news shots, to clean black-and-white medium-format portraiture, to near-pastoral landscape. But there is a band of journalistic rigor that keeps this kaleidoscope from flying off into its many pretty pieces. The result is a fascinating montage of rigorous photojournalism, found objects, and genuine concern for the Tibetans."

Naomi Yang, designer and co-publisher of Exact Change press in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

"I admire aspects of the design of many new books—clever cover ideas, elegant typography—but it's rare that I find books I enjoy as objects. With such a book, no one aspect need necessarily be outrageous or unusual, but rather the type, illustrations, paper, binding, and size all contribute to making the book a pleasure to look at and hold. ***Palm Desert*** (Emigre, 1999) by **Rudy VanderLans,** and ***Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp...in Resonance*** (Cantz Verlag, 1998) are two such books. *Palm Desert,* with photography and design by the owner of Emigre, is a personal photographic and poetic homage to a single song by the eclectic musician Van Dyke Parks that years ago captured VanderLans's imagination. The typography is a quiet lesson in proportion, and the photographs of roadside Palm Desert and Los Angeles float throughout the book. *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp ...in Resonance* is a grand undertaking by numerous contributors to document associations between the two artists, taking as its basis a collection of ephemera Cornell called the Duchamp Dossier. This contains all manner of objects Cornell associated with Duchamp, from signed ready-mades to laundry receipts retrieved from Duchamp's garbage. The fantastic illustrations are lushly presented on both coated and uncoated paper, and the typesetting contains a few hidden surprises, which seems appropriate in a book devoted to Duchamp and Cornell."

Johanna Drucker, professor of media studies at the University of Virginia and author of *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909–1923* (Chicago, 1994).

"The experimental vitality of literary works often depends on the visual and material properties of their original printed form. Poems first published in a mimeographed packet can look humdrum when slipped between the covers of a trade-press anthology. This conundrum is solved by two recent books, each of which takes as a point of departure the conviction that the 'artifactual' aspects of a text—the specifics of its production as well as of its layout and formal properties—are of literary importance. ***Imagining Language*** (MIT, 1998), edited by **Steve McCaffery** and **Jed Rasula,** is an anthology of highly visual literary works that range from the ideogramlike Easter Island Rongo-Rongo of the eighth century B.C. to Max Ernst's *Maximiliana*, which, the editors exclaim, 'exalts the doodle to a magisterial ideographic plenitude.' *Imagining Language* positively wallows in spaciousness, 'floating' each text or image in the middle of an expanse of smooth white paper. McCaffery and Rasula walk a curious line between pristine

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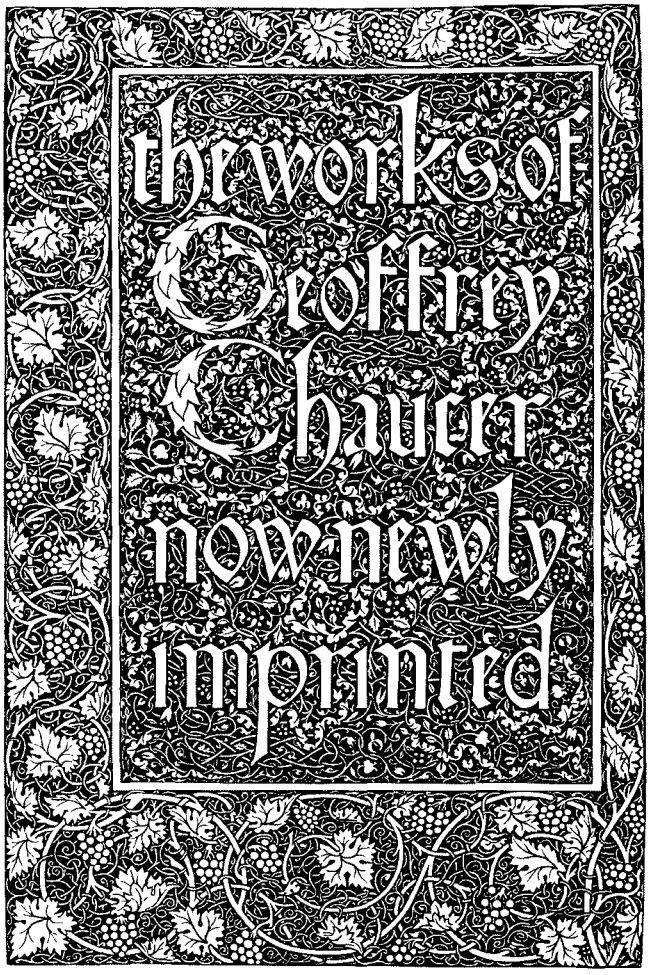
and densely replete approaches to presentation, mirroring the sensibility of many of the works they reproduce.

"*'A Secret Location on the Lower East Side': Adventures in Writing, 1960–1980* (New York Public Library and Granary Books, 1998), edited by **Steven Clay** and **Rodney Phillips,** is the catalog of a 1998 exhibit at the New York Public Library. It confines itself to twenty years of independently produced poetry, concentrating mainly on the New York City location identified in its title. The designer of *'A Secret Location on the Lower East Side,'* Marc Blaustein, assembled photographic images in an albumlike format. Snapshots, postcards, and other ephemeral memorabilia—scrapbook evidence of the private lives behind the published works—offer the reader a glimpse of the personal relationships that knit together the social fabric within which these poets worked."

William Drenttel, graphic designer and president emeritus of the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

"A century ago, William Morris established Kelmscott Press and set a standard for quality that would remain the fine-press model for the twentieth century. While design and typography have varied enormously, the great private presses of the last hundred years—Doves, Officina Bodoni, and Golden Cockerel among them—have continued to share certain fundamental values related to bookmaking. *A Century for the Century: Fine Printed Books, 1900–1999* (Grolier Club, 1999), a catalog from the exhibit of the same name with introductions by its curators, **Martin Hutner** and **Jerry Kelly,** beautifully documents the fine press tradition of twentieth-century publishing. Following a title-page design worthy of the book's subject, the essays are both informative and idiosyncratic. Included are Bibles, bibliographies, and seminal tomes that collectively suggest an almost millennial bias toward monumental works, gathering in one volume the best of this tradition.



WILLIAM MORRIS, KELMSCOTT PRESS, 1896

"Yet as much as I admire fine printing, I often feel that fine presses are oblivious to contemporary culture. With the possible exception of modern poetry, it is rare to find examples of fine printing and superior contemporary writing in a single volume. Rare, too, are books that might be classified as monumental. Yet making 'big' books is perhaps one way of asserting presence and suggesting permanence: Bindings are increasingly being engineered to sustain such heft. Such architectural values are everywhere present in *S, M, L, XL* (Monacelli, 1995), written by the prominent architect **Rem Koolhaas** and designed by **Bruce Mau**. Not since Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour's *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (MIT, 1977) has the design of a book so eloquently expressed the point of view of its authors: It's 1,376 pages of architecture documented, argued, explained, sequenced, and layered. It's monumental. And it's beautiful, too."

Sven Birkerts, author of *Readings* (Graywolf, 1999) and editor of *Tolstoy's Dictaphone: Technology and the Muse* (Graywolf, 1996).

"For me, the beauty of a book is tied less to appearance as such than to pleasure in use. A beautiful book gladdens palm, fingers, and forearm with its weight—it should feel *right,* suggesting substance not excess, and balanced, like a well-packed bag of groceries feels in the crook of the arm. It should then open easily and without complaint, lying either flat or with minimum cleavage swell from the center. The print—the charged facade of content—ought to be a clear, clean font, medium-sized; the margins should be ample, especially at page bottom, where the eye naturally lingers for a beat. I like a securely sewn set of signatures, which is implicit, I guess, in any book that opens easily and stays open. On the spine, crisp lettering: title, author, publisher.

"As it happens, I am more or less describing a 1991 edition of *Bleak House* from Knopf's Everyman Library

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series. I find that I covet these books in the same way that I once coveted the old black-spined Penguin Classics in college. Every point of design has been thought out, but I register no aesthetic intrusion. The book is packaged to proclaim its self-sufficiency—nothing stands between the reader and his experience. I am reminded, if subtly, that the printed book has a peculiar status, just midway between the immaterial stuff of its digested contents and the material thing, a husk of sorts, that I hold in my hand."

Jean Wilcox, assistant design manager of MIT Press.

"In the late nineteenth century, Harvard's Charles Eliot Norton presided over the emergence of an arts and crafts movement

peopled by Bostonians who were repulsed by the Gilded Age's mass-produced objects and overstuffed parlors and who believed passionately in the moral value of good design. ***Inspiring Reform: Boston's Arts and Crafts Movement*** (The Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, 1997), by **Marilee Boyd Meyer, David Acton,** and **Edward S. Cooke,** is a striking example of the very aesthetic it chronicles. The book's dust jacket features a handsome hand-tinted photograph by Wallace Nutting, printed on vellum stock, of a woman ascending a staircase. The vellum is slightly transparent, and beneath it bright copper text is embossed on deep-blue cloth. The text is an 1897 statement from Boston's Society of Arts and Crafts proclaiming its 'due regard for the relation between the form of the object and its use, and of harmony and fitness in the decoration put upon it.' The book itself befits this statement. It contains beautiful color reproductions of the pottery, jewelry, textiles, furniture, and art of the movement, and its layouts incorporate the floral ornaments used by the movement's artists and craftsmen. The typography resembles that of a turn-of-the-century letterpress, and the elongated trim size gives an overall graceful impression."

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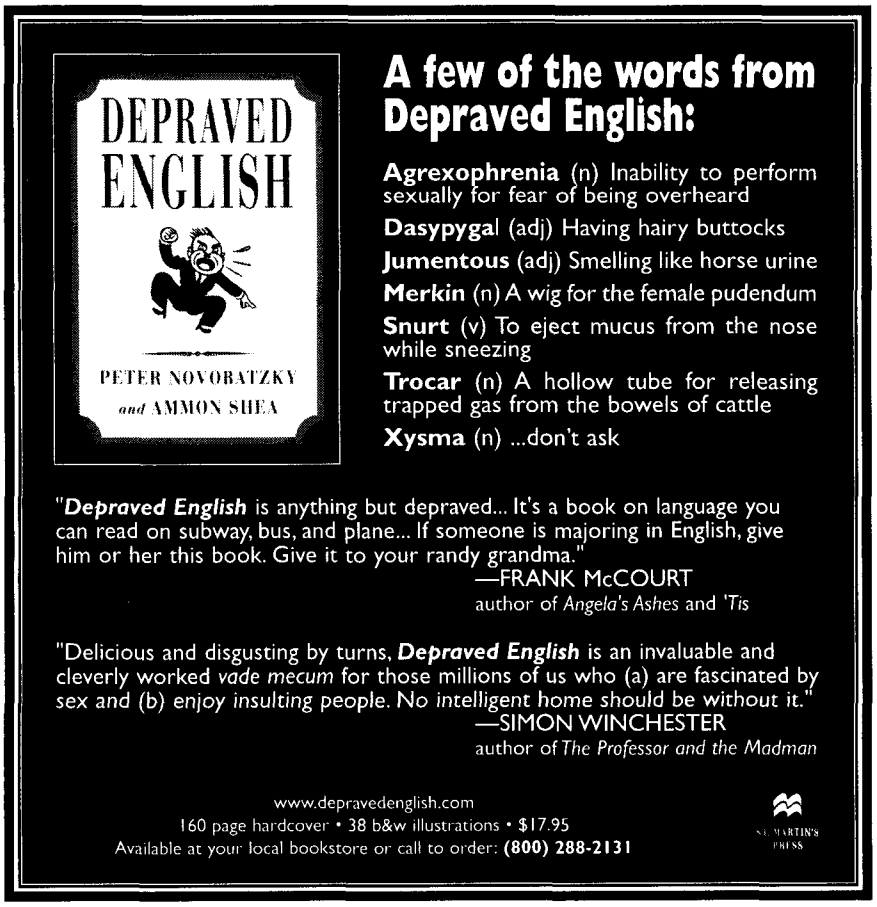
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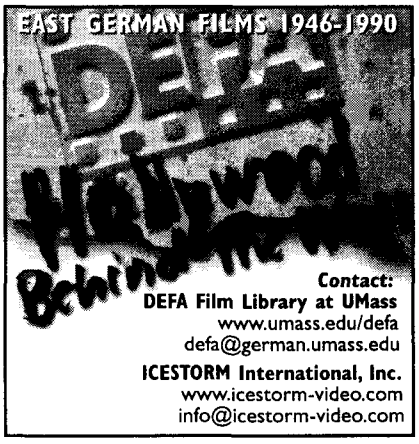

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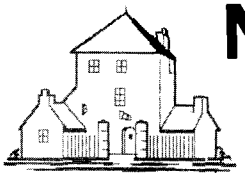

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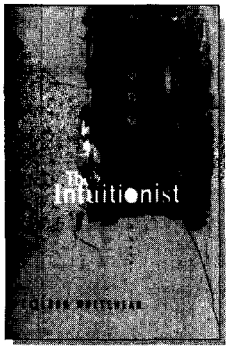

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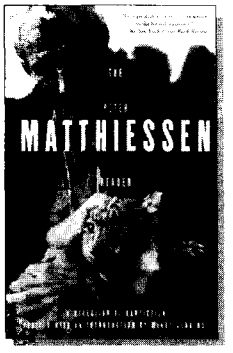

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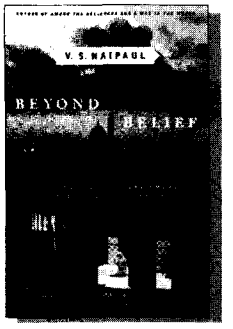

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MAGICAL MYSTERY FILES

"THE BASIC PURPOSE OF THE FREEDOM OF Information Act (FOIA) is to ensure an informed citizenry.... The more the people know about the government the better they will be governed." So the official home page of the U.S. Department of Justice has stated. First enacted in 1966, the FOIA guarantees a citizen's statutory right to all government information—including the files of the Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Immigration and Naturalization Service. One need only write a request to the proper representative at the relevant office and voilà! The documents you requested are yours.

Well, sort of. As countless researchers have discovered, FOIA documents frequently arrive as palimpsests of crossed-out text. There are nine exemptions under which the government can withhold information from a FOIA petitioner. And the applications of those exemptions—as UC-Irvine historian Jon Wiener discovered when researching *Come Together: John Lennon in His Time* (1984)—are broad indeed.

Inspired by David Garrow's book *The FBI and Martin Luther King Jr.* (1981), Wiener requested the FBI's file on John Lennon. Compiled under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover—who hoped to quell Lennon's anti-Nixon, antiwar activism—the file consists primarily of paranoid internal FBI memos, informant reports, and newspaper clippings that mention the "clever Beatle" collected from late 1971 through most of 1972. Following his request, Wiener sporadically received documents throughout the spring of 1981, acquiring about 30 percent of the file's total contents (82 of 281 pages). The rest of the documents remained classified, for the most part under three FOIA exemptions: protection of the privacy of others named in a document, protection of the identities of confidential sources, and national security. As for the documents Wiener did receive, many were completely or partially blacked out due to one exemption or another, while others discussed the same detail over and over again (for example, the Nixon administration's effort to deport Lennon in 1972).

LENNON WITH YOKO ONO
AT IMMIGRATION HEARING, 1972

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RICHARD NIXON AND J. EDGAR HOOVER

Perusing the FBI files, Jon Wiener hoped to uncover a "Rock and Roll Watergate."

Dissatisfied with the results of his petition, Wiener appealed to the associate attorney general for full disclosure. He argued that using the national security exemption to withhold information about Lennon's plans to protest Nixon's reelection was "arbitrary and capricious" and that other withheld documents were "not properly covered by the exemptions claimed." Six weeks later, he heard from President Reagan's assistant attorney general for legal policy, who had referred the national security material to the Department Review Committee and personally affirmed the withholding of the rest. Six months after that, when the review committee concluded that the national security exemption had been illigitimately applied, Wiener should have had a victory—but he didn't. The documents, the government decided, would now be kept classified under other exemptions: personal privacy and confidential source information. Exasperated, Wiener decided it was time to find a lawyer.

This is, roughly, where Wiener's new book, *Gimme Some Truth: The John Lennon FBI Files* (California, 1999), begins. With the help of the ACLU, Wiener sued the FBI in 1983, seeking both information and vindication. He requested "an injunction ordering the FBI to release [all] documents, a written finding stating that the FBI 'acted arbitrarily or capriciously' in withholding the documents, and last but not least, an award of costs and attorney fees." Initially, Wiener had hoped to include Lennon's FBI files in *Come Together.* But, unsurprisingly, his case did not progress that quickly, and the book went to press without the information. Ready to put Lennon behind him at that point, Weiner says, "I was ready to do something else."

In a sense, *Wiener* v. *FBI* became that "something else." Though initially fueled by the hunger for Lennon knowledge, Wiener's lawsuit also became the political crusade of a tenured radical with an antibureaucratic impulse. Indeed, with dreams of contributing to the historical record of Nixon's disreputable deeds, Wiener sought to expose a "Rock and Roll Watergate." With "The Declaration of Jonathan M. Wiener," a document submitted to the courts in 1987, Wiener concluded that "the Nixon administration's persecution of Lennon was one small part of a massive, illegal effort to ensure Nixon's reelection" and that "Lennon's FBI file contained the best and in some cases the only documentation of some Nixon-era abuses of presidential power."

In *Gimme Some Truth,* Wiener spends roughly one hundred pages chronicling his fourteen years of litigation—"long dry spells where nothing happened" peppered with "intermittent flurries of activity." The lawsuit makes for an entertaining narrative, replete with plot twists, fumbling witnesses, and stubborn judges—all strung together with Wiener's commentary on the FOIA, the right to know, and the litigation process. Thus, when the case closes in 1997 with a settlement in which several files remain classified, the finale is something of a letdown.

In exchange for eighty new pages of material previously withheld under the confidential informant exemption, Wiener's team had to agree that the FBI's release of information "shall not be construed either by the parties or the Court as an admission, tacit or otherwise, that such information was 'improperly withheld'.... Nor shall such release be construed as an admission, tacit or otherwise, that the FBI was not justified in withholding such information." This stings, especially when "Part Two" of Wiener's book is considered.

This section, called simply "The Files," includes facsimiles of a hundred Lennon-file documents; and the newly disclosed information, one finds, is often puzzling or simply trivial. Much of it appears in a before-and-after state, one page showing a document as Wiener received it in the

PREVIOUS PAGE: ASSOCIATED PRESS AP; CORBIS/BETTMANN

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1980s—full of marked-through words and heavy black lines—and another showing it after the settlement, when the FBI disclosed previously censored information. A document from January 1972 had the following line blacked out until the settlement: "Mike Drobenare is now using his parent's [sic] car again."

Other documents detail the FBI's wide-ranging but hapless efforts to track Lennon. One recommends that Lennon be "arrested if at all possible on [a] possession of narcotics charge," which would make him "immediately deportable." Another offers the bureau's scrupulously detailed report on the 1971 John Sinclair Freedom Rally, an event that drew fifteen thousand people calling for the release of the MC5 singer, who had been sentenced to ten years in state prison for selling two joints of marijuana to an undercover agent. The FBI report includes a careful transcription of the words to Lennon's song "John Sinclair" ("It ain't fair, John Sinclair / ...Let him be, let him free / Let him be like you and me") as well as a word-for-word rendering of an anti-Nixon speech delivered by Jerry Rubin. Echoing the ACLU's argument in court, Weiner writes that the transcription of the Sinclair song is "evidence that the FBI lacked a legitimate law enforcement purpose in its investigation of Lennon.... It was not a crime to sing a song about John Sinclair—it was a form of political expression protected by the First Amendment."

In the case of the Rubin speech, however, Wiener makes a different point. "This document provides an example of the invaluable role the FBI played in creating and preserving unique historical records," he writes. "There's nowhere else you can go to find speeches like this; no one else had the resources, or the motivation, to produce and save verbatim transcripts of political rallies."

Indeed, Lennon is not the only prominent cultural figure whose FBI files might be of use to historians. The bureau has long been keeping tabs on famous folks suspected of disloyalty to the government—among them Bertolt Brecht, Lucille Ball, John Steinbeck, and Paul Robeson. And for all the troubles Wiener has had in getting the Lennon files out into the open, it's worth noting that the files on Brecht and company are now available on line: Just log on to the FBI's Web site (www.fbi.gov), and click on "Freedom of Information Act." You will then find yourself in the "Reading Room." There, under the list of headings—espionage, famous persons, gangster era, historical interest, unusual phenomena, and violent crime—just choose your fancy. It's a lot easier than filing a lawsuit.

HILLARY FREY

THE FORGOTTEN FIGURE

THE WORK OF FAIRFIELD PORTER, THE LITTLE-known, stubbornly independent painter, is sneaking into museums on both coasts and, in the process, shaking up long-accepted notions of American modernism. That the Whitney Museum's *American Century* survey includes a Porter canvas suggests that this notoriously unclassifiable artist is finally receiving the serious attention he deserves. Still, his champions mainly come from limited quarters—namely, literary scholars and those interested in the perennially hip nexus of New York poets and painters of the 1950s and 1960s. A doggedly representational painter in the heroic era of American abstraction, Porter remains an enigmatic character, admired both by fervent conservatives like Hilton Kramer and avant-gardists like John Ashbery. Perhaps this should not be surprising, for Porter, as Ashbery has written, "is one of those innovators whose originality can come perilously close to seeming old-fashioned."

Will the Fairfield Porter revival shake up the history of American modernism?

While his contemporaries Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko have recently been the subjects of major retrospectives, Porter, too, is enjoying a certain revival. This January, Yale University Press will issue the first full-scale biography, *Fairfield Porter: A Life in Art,* by Justin Spring; it accompanies a Porter exhibit at New York's Equitable Gallery that will open in March. Last year, David Lehman's cultural history, *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets* (Doubleday), paid considerable attention to Porter's escapades with the literary crowd. Meanwhile, a traveling exhibition organized at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), *In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art,* brings together several Porters, along with work by a number of other artists, in an attempt to sort out the relationships between O'Hara, the poet and curator, and his many friends in the art world. The exhibition will open this January at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio before moving in June to the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton.

Happily, neither Porter's group-show cameos nor his starring roles manage to typecast this most slippery of artists. Instead, they raise a set of questions to which critics have offered only partial answers. Was Porter a staid Yankee loner who shunned the fashionable abstract expres-

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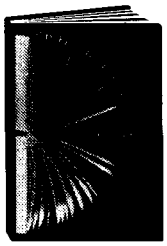

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sionism of the late 1940s for cool portraits of friends and family and brilliantly expressive evocations of the light and landscape along the Atlantic coast? A crypto-abstractionist, concerned more with color and space than with the figures that occupy them? A minor artist whom notable characters like Willem de Kooning and Clement Greenberg just happened to take seriously? Or an innovator who provided an alternative direction for modernism, serving as the essential link between the watery-hued *intimisme* of Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard and the work of more recent figurative painters such as Larry Rivers, Jane Freilicher, and Alex Katz?

Even his sexuality remains ambiguous, though the trend seems to favor a queer Porter over the longtime family man most of his friends knew. The MOCA show features two erotically charged drawings of O'Hara nude but for a pair of unlaced boots, and Spring devotes a large number of pages to Porter's bisexuality, in particular his relationship with the poet James Schuyler.

Born in 1907 to the same generation as the abstract expressionists—the first New York school—Porter never painted an abstraction, though his longtime friend de Kooning did influence his technique in the direction of more vigorous brushwork and a more chromatic palette. In one sense, Porter painted against the ab-ex crowd: After overhearing Greenberg tell de Kooning that one could no longer paint figuratively, he decided to push ahead with representational canvases. "I might have become an abstract painter except for that," Porter explained. Not the cowering sort, he wrestled with Greenberg for years: "We always argued. We always disagreed. Everything that one of us said, the other would say no to it. He told me I was very conceited. I thought my opinions were as good as his or better." Those opinions found an outlet in Porter's eloquent critical writings, but again his taste defied partisan expectations. He tended to be harsh with the standard-bearers of American realism while enthusiastically reviewing square pegs like Joseph Cornell and Jasper Johns.

Spring's biography provides an opportunity to consider for the first time the entirety of Porter's vita and his place in an art world that could never exactly pin him down. Spring attentively records Porter's blue-blooded ancestry; his boyhood in Winnetka, Illinois, and on Great Spruce Head Island, Maine; his marriage to the poet Anne Channing; and the difficulties they had raising five children, one of whom suffered from a severe mental disorder, probably autism. Still, a healthier dose of telling anecdotes, such as that Porter chose his children's schools by their smell—"If the school smells of urine, it means the children are scared and unhappy"—would have enlivened Spring's tale. He expends a torrent of words on the artist's youthful political infatuations—Trotsky, Council Communism, socialism—but brings little of it to bear on the later work, although he does discuss Porter's early, politically driven mural painting. Of friends like de Kooning or the flamboyant impresario John Myers we get only glimpses.

PORTRAIT OF FRANK O'HARA, 1957

After hearing Clement Greenberg say that one could no longer paint figuratively, Porter decided to push ahead with representational canvases.

What does come through, however, is Porter's indeterminate status as a painter. Russell Ferguson, the curator of *In Memory of My Feelings,* emphasizes the same point in the show's catalog, which has recently been published by the University of California Press. "Despite much recent scholarship, the oversimplified narrative remains only too familiar: a heroic generation of Abstract Expressionist pioneers followed by a much weaker 'second generation,' and then by the explosion of Pop. In that version of history, there is little room for the strong tradition of realist and figurative painting that continued throughout the period." Like O'Hara, Porter resisted, and continues to resist, categorization; they were walking paradoxes, summed up on the surface by their similar tie-and-jacket bohemianism; fence straddlers of a sort, spurned at times by both the arrière- and the avant-garde.

Clearly, the Whitney felt the challenge of presenting Fairfield Porter to a largely uninitiated public. He barely merits a sentence in the catalog,

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES

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and the one Porter work included, *Portrait of Ted Carey and Andy Warhol,* appears to have been chosen not because it's a typical Porter but for its sexiness. Perhaps the sole portrait of a celebrity he ever painted—albeit before Warhol was a celebrity—the painting is compelling, from the curator's standpoint, both for its broadly recognizable content and for its louche tinge of homosexuality. Then again, there is an astuteness to the choice. While Lehman views Porter as a concomitant to the New York school poets, Spring and Ferguson recognize that his example strongly affected the resurgence of figurative painting in the 1950s, from which pop art emerged.

Porter's double portrait of Carey and Warhol shares a room at the Whitney with a host of works by other artists who are also in the O'Hara exhibit—Katz, Alice Neel, and Rivers, to name a few. It's a room that stands like an eddy off to the side of the main current of modernism, a small whorl of facts not yet integrated into the accepted narrative that runs from abstraction through pop to minimalism and beyond. Now that literary scholars and art historians are joining today's painters in taking another look at recalcitrant members of the figurative fringe like Porter, it seems the story of American modernism, about which so much has already been written, still lacks its final chapter.

DANIEL KUNITZ

THE DEAD

FOR THE MOST PART, AMERICAN SOCIAL historians haven't written a whole lot about death. Of course, they've exhaustively covered almost every other segment of the life cycle—birth, adolescence, marriage, even old age—but the final passage has escaped attention, despite the fact that most historical subjects are, well, dead.

Recently, however, a number of historians have been churning out macabre monographs. Many of these scholars owe a substantial debt to the French historian Philippe Ariès, who penned *Western Attitudes Toward Death* (1974) and the even more upbeat *The Hour of Our Death* (1981). In these works, Ariès chronicled dramatic shifts in attitudes toward death: the medieval acceptance of mortality as part of the human condition; the often dramatic public funerals of the Renaissance; the increasing romanticization of death from the sixteenth century onward; and the growing discomfort with it in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, as modern medicine stepped in to negotiate the final moments of life and a new professional group, undertakers, took over the care and disposal of the corpse.

Wells's study introduces a town undertaker who urged coffin buyers to plan ahead for a cholera epidemic.

MICHAEL MURPHY (3)

Not surprisingly, Ariès's influence runs through much of the accumulating literature on American death, including Robert V. Wells's *Facing the "King of Terrors"* (Cambridge), a just-published community study of death and society in Schenectady, New York, from colonial times to the present. Wells, a professor of history at Union College, spent ten years trolling his hometown's newspapers, archives, cemeteries, and court records in search of information about death and dying.

Wells begins in the Colonial era, when the people of Schenectady treated death much the way medieval peasants did: as a grim fact of life. He then traces the antebellum sentimentalization of death, along with its eventual submission to the funeral industry that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He breaks with Ariès and other scholars only in arguing that twentieth-century Schnectadians, while loath to discuss death in personal terms, were more than happy to experience vicarious deaths: violent movies, sensationalist news, celebrity deaths, and other gruesome entertainment.

Wells's narrative is rich in particulars. A single chapter ranges over topics as disparate as mock funerals staged by college fraternities; vacuum pumps used to empty air from coffins; the tale of a servant girl who likely died at the hands of the town abortionist; local coverage of Abraham Lincoln's funeral; Egyptian-style gravestone iconography; gallows humor; smallpox outbreaks; and the cost of a moderate funeral in New York City circa 1867 (a whopping $382, before cemetery expenses). Throughout, Wells interweaves melancholic tales of consumption, suicide, and infant mortality with almost laughable episodes: the businessman whose body was seized by creditors pending settlement of his debts, and the town undertaker who advertised coffins in advance of a cholera epidemic, urging people to plan ahead.

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Meanwhile, other historians have been constructing national histories of the corpse and the cemetery. Take, for example, David Charles Sloane's *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History* (Johns Hopkins, 1991), which arguably inaugurated the present spate of scholarship. It explores the vast necropolises that litter the American landscape, revealing how the dead made it to the suburbs before the living. As the population of the dead grew in the eighteenth century, Sloane notes, churchyards had difficulty accommodating new arrivals, and corpses ended up stuffed in aboveground tombs or shallow graves. By the early nineteenth century, physicians began to blame yellow-fever epidemics on the vapors emitted by the crush of bodies. While the so-called miasma theory of disease was baseless, there was plenty of cause for complaint. Upon opening the vault of a church in New York City in August, one inspector reported with considerable understatement that the smell was "peculiarly offensive."

The rural cemetery—a picturesque burial ground on the outskirt of a citie—offered a solution. The founders of places like Mount Auburn and Greenwood Cemeteries buried bodies under rolling hills and weeping willows, far from the municipal water supply and the crowds of the city. Meanwhile, the cremation movement had also gotten under way. It, too, was presented as a public health crusade. But unlike the wealthy planners—and future occupants—of palatial mausoleums like Mount Auburn, cremationists carried on an egalitarian impulse: They sought to erase class distinctions by reducing everyone to ashes.

In *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799–1883* (Yale, 1996), Gary Laderman focuses on the dread and disgust we feel in the presence of corpses. Like Wells and Sloane, he traces a shift from the grim resignation and stoicism evident in the funeral rituals of the Colonial era to the peculiar forms of sentimentality that arose in the antebellum years. Whereas the Puritans bundled corpses into the ground with little ceremony, antebellum Protestants turned to them as a way of keeping the memory of the departed person alive, either by photographing the body or, better yet, by visiting the corpse as it decomposed. Women, especially, had what one critic termed a "morbid desire...to descend into the damp and dreary tomb—to lift the lid—and look upon the changing, softening, corrupting features of a parent or child—to gaze upon the mouldering bones."

The carnage of the Civil War, argues Laderman, ushered in new attitudes toward the dead. Embalming, previously an exotic and rarely practiced ritual, became more commonplace, especially on the front lines. Itinerant undertakers began advertising their services near the front. One went so far as to "cordially invite" customers "to call and examine specimens." Not everyone appreciated this entrepreneurial zeal: In one instance, the army forced an embalmer to take down advertisements he had posted outside an encampment on the somewhat legitimate grounds that the ads were bad for morale.

Lincoln's death provided a spectacular display of the magic of mummification. As his pickled body made the long journey home to Springfield, Illinois, the public marveled at the remarkable preservation and peaceful countenance of the president. Laderman digs up several sources neglected by Lincoln's biographers, such as the praise one journalist heaped on the presiding mortician. "The scalp has been removed, the brain scooped out, the chest opened and the blood emptied," he wrote. "Abraham Lincoln, so cunningly contemplated in this splendid coffin, is a mere shell, an effigy, a sculpture."

In the postbellum years, Laderman maintains, the funeral industry transformed the corpse into a commodity. A new class of professionals whisked away bodies before they cooled, mummifying the remains and taking over the duties of display and

The founders of Greenwood Cemetery buried bodies under rolling hills and weeping willows, far from the city.

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With the growing popularity of embalming, mourners no longer had to confront the more gruesome realities of decomposition and decay.

burial. Corpses, Laderman argues, began to lose their importance in religious ritual, and with the growing popularity of embalming, mourners no longer had to confront the more gruesome realities of decomposition and decay. Nor, it seems, did they want to: Rational thinkers of the late nineteenth century frowned on watching loved ones molder in the grave. In the end, death became, à la Ariès, a taboo subject, a matter of private grief distasteful to the public at large.

That aversion remains. In 1977, Ariès himself observed that Western societies were "ashamed of death" and that a "heavy silence has fallen over the subject." So why should academics talk about death now? The AIDS epidemic has undoubtedly played a part: Public images of patients wasting away have done much to remind people that death comes to us all. The aging of the baby boomers, along with the growing interest in hospice care, has also helped shift attention away from the living and onto the dead, as have films like *The Sixth Sense*, with its city of haunted souls. Although death may never lose its stigma, the books discussed here suggest that history can encompass not only the deeds and achievements of the living, but their death and departure as well.

STEPHEN MIHM

THE NONCONFORMIST

IN *THE CONFORMIST* (1951), ALBERTO MORAVIA'S chilling novel about the fascist mind, an Italian spy is dispatched to Paris to aid in the killing of his former college teacher Professor Quadri. Moravia notes:

> Quadri's anti-fascism, his unwarlike, unhealthy, unattractive appearance, his learning, his books, everything about him, in fact, went to make up...the conventional picture, continually pointed at in scorn by Party propaganda, of the negative, impotent intellectual.

In fact, the model for this antifascist professor was none other than Moravia's own cousin Carlo Rosselli—a man who possessed few of the qualities of his fictional counterpart. Far from being an "impotent" academic, Rosselli was the very portrait of the engaged intellectual: a prolific journalist, a political theorist who wrote a seminal treatise on socialism, and an activist who conspired against Mussolini's regime. And his life resembles a political thriller. In the 1920s, he helped found, and wrote for, the first antifascist underground newspaper in Italy. After helping a prominent socialist leader escape the country, he was imprisoned on the island of Lipari, where he

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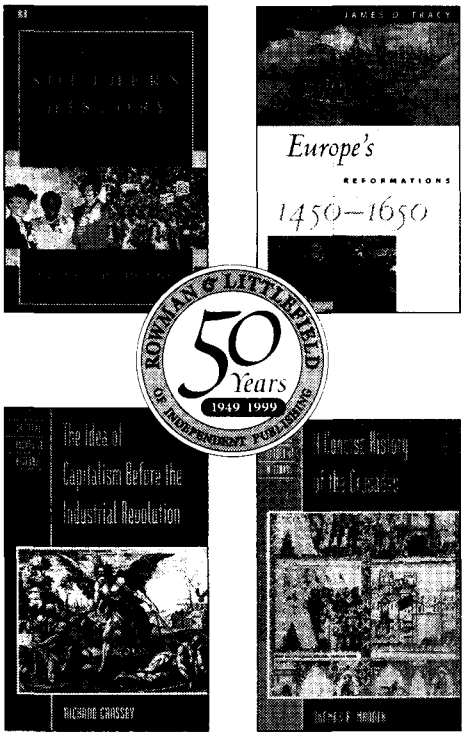

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wrote his major work, *Liberal Socialism* (Princeton). He made a daring escape by motorboat and then fled to Paris, where he established the antifascist Justice and Liberty Party, a focal point for clandestine activities against Mussolini. He led a column of volunteers for the Republic in the Spanish civil war (most other Italians fought for Franco), and he organized airplane leafleting campaigns over Italy. But Rosselli's downfall came when he got involved in a plot to assassinate Mussolini. In 1937, Rosselli was killed by rightist thugs in the employ of the Italian government.

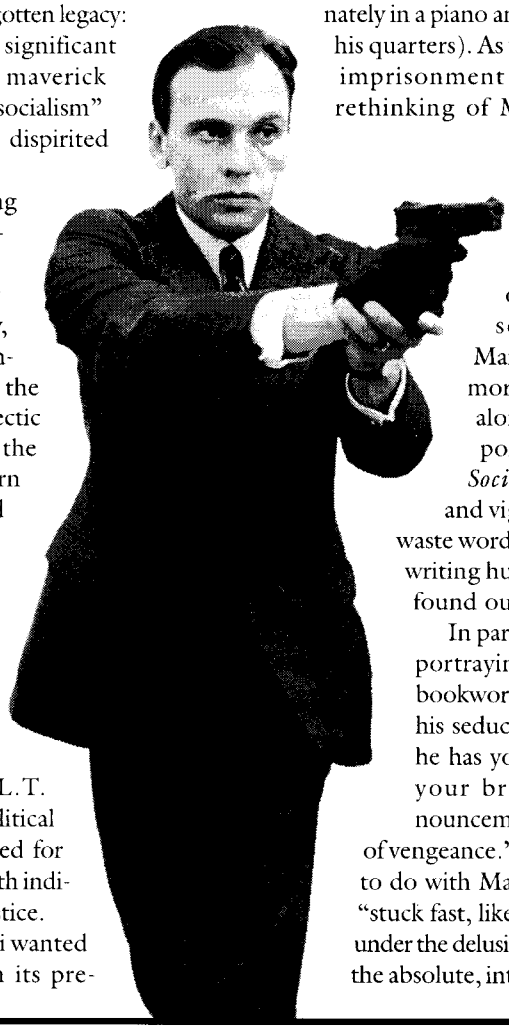
Although his contemporary and fellow political prisoner Antonio Gramsci has become a revered antifascist martyr, Rosselli is, sadly, little known in the English-speaking world. Stanislao G. Pugliese's intellectual biography, *Carlo Rosselli: Socialist Heretic and Antifascist Exile* (Harvard), is the first book-length account of Rosselli's life to appear in English. It is a demandingly dense work, requiring a thorough knowledge of the Italian left. Nonetheless, Pugliese's study does much to shore up a forgotten legacy: Rosselli is presented as a significant intellectual and political maverick whose vision of a "liberal socialism" has much to offer today's dispirited transatlantic left.

Pugliese begins by placing Rosselli in the socialist firmament of early 1920s Florence. Born into a secular and patriotic Jewish family, he completed a thesis on syndicalism and belonged to the Circolo di Cultura, an eclectic study group "open to all the free mainstreams of modern thought." Rosselli flourished in this setting. Although a committed socialist, he was critical of Marx's stranglehold on the movement, and he was drawn to the English liberal tradition of John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold. Pugliese notes the influence of L.T. Hobhouse, an English political philosopher who had argued for a state that would ensure both individual liberty and social justice.

Like Hobhouse, Rosselli wanted to detach liberalism from its prevailing identity as the official ideology of the free market. He was aware that "liberalism" was a notoriously loose term, which, as he wrote, has "unfortunately...been used to smuggle so many different kinds of merchandise and has been so much the preserve of the bourgeoisie in the past, that today a socialist has difficulty bringing himself to use it." However, Rosselli argued, socialists needed to appreciate liberalism's affirmation of individual freedom, even as they sought to extend that freedom from the realm of politics into the economy. As Rosselli put it: "Socialism is nothing more than the logical development, taken to its extreme consequences, of the principle of liberty." In this, Rosselli went against the grain of prevailing social democratic beliefs, which favored a strong and centralized state and were still closely tied to Marxist ideology; his vision was decidedly antistatist.

The completion of Rosselli's synthetic vision came during his internment on Lipari, where he wrote *Liberal Socialism* (which he hid alternately in a piano and a rabbit hutch outside his quarters). As with Gramsci, Rosselli's imprisonment led him to a serious rethinking of Marxism; but whereas Gramsci remained an active and influential member of the Italian Communist Party and a disciple of Marx, Rosselli jettisoned the tenets of Marxism entirely, alienating more doctrinaire socialists along the way. Unlike most political treatises, *Liberal Socialism* was brief, witty, and vigorous. Rosselli did not waste words, and one imagines him writing hurriedly, for fear of being found out by his wardens.

In part, Rosselli saluted Marx, portraying him as an "irritable bookworm" who "traps you with his seductive dialectic, and when he has you in his grip, he makes your brain shiver with pronouncements worthy of the god of vengeance." But he wanted nothing to do with Marx's acolytes, who were "stuck fast, like an oyster to a reef, and under the delusion that they alone possess the absolute, integral, intangible truth."



After completing his masterwork, *Liberal Socialism*, in prison, Rosselli made a daring escape by motorboat and then fled to Paris.

ABOVE: CARLO ROSSELLI

BELOW: STILL FROM *THE CONFORMIST*

ABOVE: ARCHIVO CENTRALE DELLO STATO (ROME); PHOTOFEST

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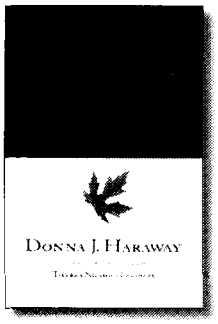

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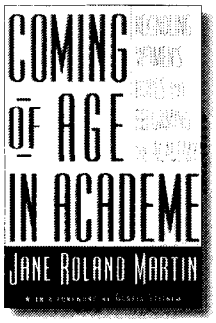

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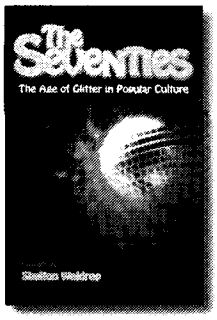

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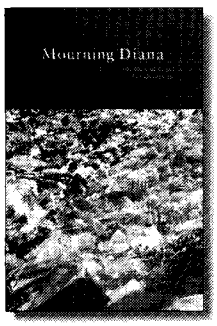

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ROUTLEDGE

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Most of all, Marxist theory bothered him on account of its defeatism: It "humiliates mankind by reminding it continually of its littleness in comparison with the formidable forces of the environment, nature, and society.... Historical materialism, when the proletarian applies it, becomes not a liberating philosophy but a philosophy that shows him his chains." To the Marxist faithful, Pugliese remarks, Rosselli's attitude toward this central doctrine was a heresy "tantamount to declaring that Christianity was an obstacle to the salvation of the soul."

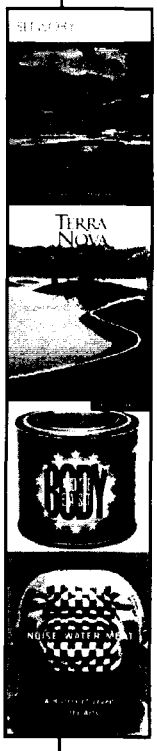
But what of liberal socialism as a practical approach to governance? Rosselli writes movingly of his vision that it is "more than a system of political mechanics, it is intended to be a sort of a *pact of civility,*" predicated on the "democratic method" and the institutions of civil society, particularly those of the labor movement: cooperatives, trade unions, and guilds (in this he drew on Gramsci).

These are fine sentiments but hardly applicable in fascist Italy, where there was little reasoning with a Blackshirt. Indeed, Rosselli's reckoning with fascism was the weakest part of *Liberal Socialism.* Perhaps too naively, he thought that the rise of Mussolini would force the Italians to confront the "life-and-death problems" of fascism, uniting "the most miserable laborer in Calabria...[with] the most refined intellectual" in an "awareness of the value of liberty." But this vision smacked of the kind of Marxist determinism he despised. "With truncheons and handcuffs, and with more refined torments, Mussolini is constructing modern Italians, volunteers for liberty, by the tens of thousands," he wrote.

Unfortunately, it would take a world war to bring about the fall of Mussolini, and Rosselli's "tens of thousands" certainly did not materialize until then. Although he and his allies in the Justice and Liberty movement struggled valiantly in the 1930s—drafting proposals for a postfascist Italy based on parliamentary democracy, regional autonomies, and the nationalization of essential services—it was mostly a losing battle. And despite Rosselli's many admirers in contemporary Italy, including the philosopher Norberto Bobbio, postwar Italian politics has been known more for its corruption and instability than for its civility. Perhaps Rosselli's own demise was a harbinger of this: In the end, the man who tried to define a politics of civility fell prey to an assassin's bullet.

MATTHEW PRICE

Despite the efforts of Rosselli's many admirers, postwar Italian politics is known more for its corruption than for its civility.



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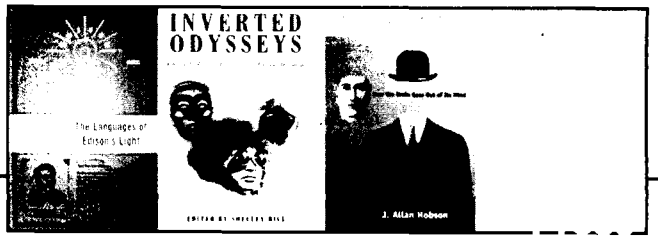

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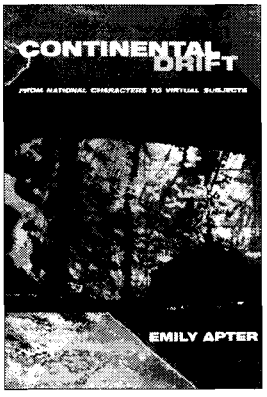

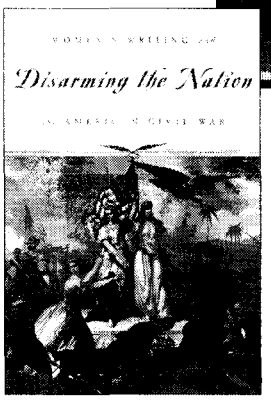

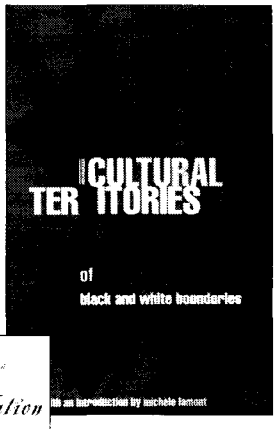

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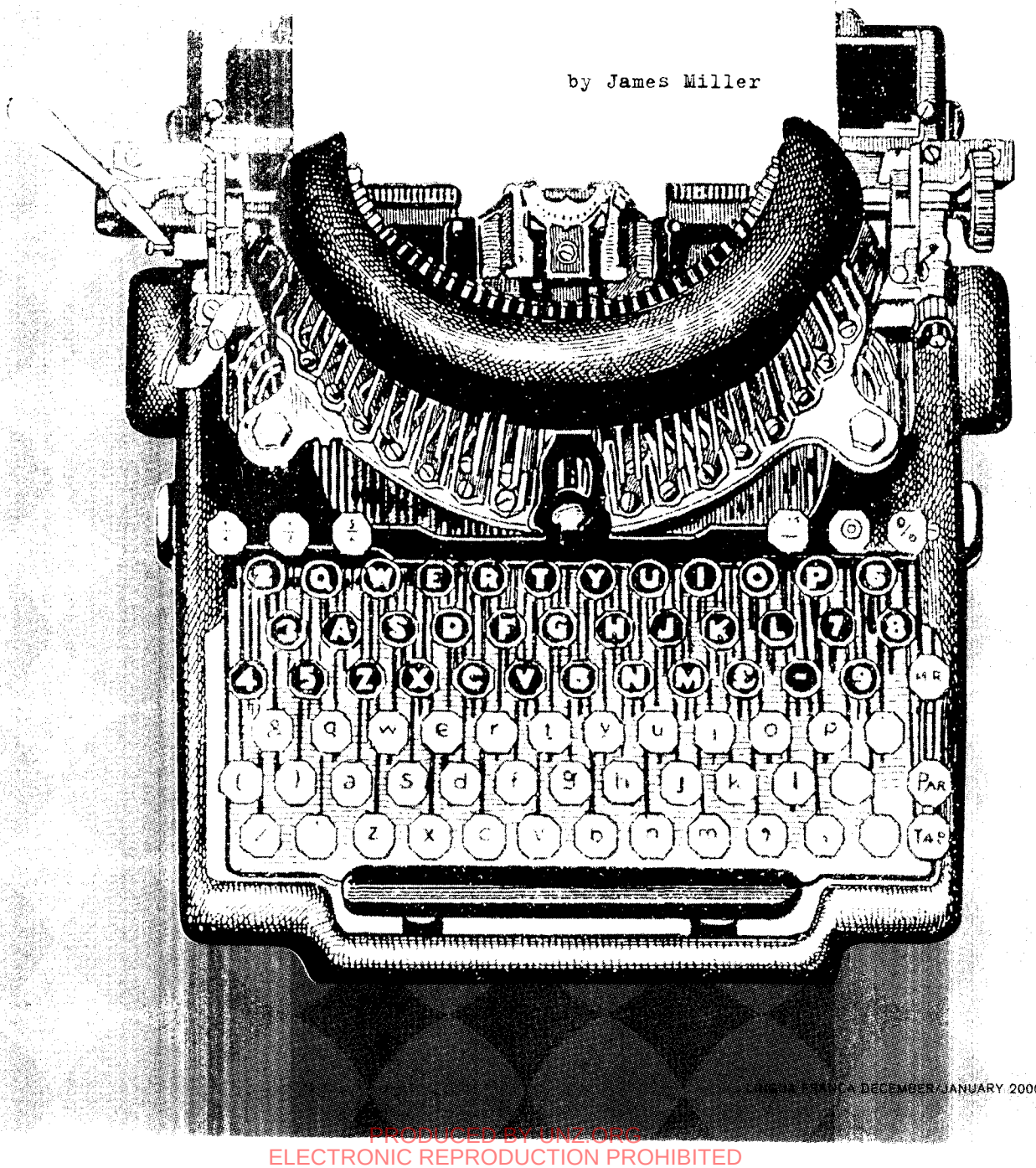
Is Bad Writing Necessary?

George Orwell, Theodor Adorno, and The Politics of Language

by James Miller



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THESE ARE TRYING TIMES FOR the left in America, which may be one reason why a bitter debate has erupted among avowedly left-wing academics and intellectuals over a venerable topic—"Politics and the English Language," to borrow the title of George Orwell's famous 1946 essay. Must one write clearly, as Orwell argued, or are thinkers who are truly radical and subversive compelled to write radically and subversively—or even opaquely, as if through a glass darkly? That is the question.

On one side stand academic luminaries like University of California at Berkeley rhetorician Judith Butler and University of Pittsburgh English professor Jonathan Arac, who take their inspiration from critical theorists like Michel Foucault and Theodor Adorno. Arguing that their work has been misunderstood by journalists on the left, these radical professors distrust the demand for "linguistic transparency," charging that it cripples one's ability "to think the world more radically."

On the other side are ranged a variety of public intellectuals and journalists like UCLA historian Russell Jacoby, feminist writer Katha Pollitt, and NYU physicist Alan Sokal. Intolerant of bewildering jargon, they cannot see how deliberately difficult prose can possibly help change the world. As their patron saint, they often nominate George Orwell, the very image of a man who spoke truth to power and spoke it plainly.

One thing the plain talkers on the left share is relatively greater access to a wider public. In part, this is because they know how to write with "linguistic transparency." But as Pollitt has ruefully pointed out, the proponents of plain talk have also doubtless benefited from the long-standing anti-intellectualism of the American mass media. Keen to simplify and wary of sustained argument, those who oversee the media are generally impatient with abstraction and complexity as well as the qualifications and nuances that might slow down the majority of readers. They want facts reported and explanations and arguments conveyed as painlessly as possible. As a result, writers on the left who can handle complex topics with terseness, clarity, and brio exercise an apparent influence on the wider culture out of all proportion to their standing, if any, in the academy.

This situation not only excites the envy of some left academics; it also fuels their suspicion that plain talk is politically perfidious—reinforcing, rather than radically challenging, the cultural status quo. Indeed, last year, the academic organizers of a conference at the University of California at Santa Cruz made exactly this case, trying to pin the pejorative label "left conservatism" onto some of their most widely read critics.

If orwell perfectly exemplifies the party of clarity, it might be said that the German philosopher Theodor Adorno has come to represent the party of opacity. Consider the most recent episode in this internecine Kulturkampf, which occurred this spring after the editors of *Philosophy and Literature* bestowed their annual Bad Writing award on Judith Butler. Stung into action, Butler defended herself—in an Op-Ed piece of defiant lucidity—in the columns of *The New York Times*. And she cited Adorno to do so. But this was not the end of it. A few months later, when the literary critic Terry Eagleton complained in the *London Review of Books* about the labored style of Gayatri Spivak, the prominent post-colonial theorist, Butler weighed in to defend Spivak and denounce Eagleton. And, once again, Adorno served as her witness.

"Surely," Butler proclaimed in a letter to the editors, "neither the *LRB* nor Eagleton believes that theorists should confine themselves to writing introductory primers such as those that he has chosen to provide." Precisely because pathbreaking thinkers like Butler and Spivak are in pursuit of something bigger and better than a primer—Butler calls it "critical theory"—they refuse the "truisms which, now fully commodified as 'radical theory,' pass as critical thinking." If their prose is sometimes hard to read, that is because they, unlike Eagleton, are performing true critical thinking: "Adorno surely had it right," asserts Butler, "when he wrote—in *Minima Moralia*—about those who recirculate received opinion: 'only what they do not need first to understand, they consider understandable; only the word coined by commerce, and really alienated, touches them as familiar.'"

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? And how have Orwell and Adorno, two long-dead figures, come to represent the poles of this debate? It was a half century ago that Orwell warned of the totalitarian use value of the evasive euphemism, the deliberately misleading oxymoron, and the proliferation of obfuscating abstraction in political prose, not least among academics on the left (a prime target of "Politics and the English Language" was Harold Laski, a leading light of the Labour Party). For a quarter century, Orwell's aesthetic convictions carried the day, at least on the anti-Stalinist left. In *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), the radical sociologist C. Wright Mills approvingly cited Orwell's example in contrasting the "confidence of the individual craftsman in his own ability to know reality" with the "bureaucratization of reason." Ten years later, Noam Chomsky used Orwell to throw darts at a different target, those segments of the academic left avowedly uninterested in practical politics: "George Orwell once remarked that political thought, especially on the left, is a sort of masturbation fantasy in which the world of fact hardly matters. That's true, unfortunately, and it's part of the reason that our society lacks a genuine, responsible, serious left-wing movement."

However plausible the position of Orwell and Mills and Chomsky, one cannot help but notice that Adorno's formidable *Minima Moralia*—the work cited in self-defense by Butler—was written at roughly the same time as Orwell's pioneering essay and commands a similar following among left-wing intellectuals.

Orwell and Adorno, both born in 1903, were early and outspoken foes of fascism and Stalinism. Both, deservedly, are icons of the independent left. And their worldviews overlapped in other ways as well. They each regarded the postwar world in the most dire terms: Adorno saw both Western Europe and the Soviet Union as entirely "administered" societies where the prospects for genuine freedom were few; Orwell defined political speech as the "defense of the indefensible," adding that contemporary politics could be summed up by its "evasions, folly, hatred, schizophrenia." Both men also saw a close relation between the corruption of language and the corruption of politics. Orwell protested that "orthodoxy, of whatever color, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style." Adorno wrote, "Where there is something that needs to be said, indifference to literary form always indicates dogmatization of content." Both were appalled by the replacement of evocative words with prefabricated, ready-made

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phrases. When Adorno asserted that "defiance of society includes defiance of its language," Orwell would have agreed.

And yet when it came to assessing the need for clear language in social criticism, they parted ways dramatically. In "Politics and the English Language," Orwell asserts that to write and think "clearly is a necessary first step toward political regeneration." In his 1956 essay "Punctuation Marks," Adorno asserts, just as boldly, that "lucidity, objectivity, and concise precision" are merely "ideologies" that have been "invented" by "editors and then writers" for "their own accommodation."

So whose views on language—Orwell's or Adorno's—seem most cogent in retrospect? And why did these two estimable authors come to such drastically different conclusions about the morality of style?

For a quarter century, Orwell's aesthetic convictions carried the day, at least on the anti-Stalinist left.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN German in 1951, Adorno's *Minima Moralia* is one of the most intransigent pieces of cultural criticism in this century. The book was written in the 1940s, while Adorno was an unhappy exile in America. Divided into three parts—"1944," "1945," and "1946–1947"—the text consists of 153 numbered entries with deadpan titles ("They, the people," "Tough baby," and so on). Fragmentary and nonsequential, solemn and simultaneously offhand, each fragment circles briefly around a theme. Some of the book's most celebrated formulations are defiantly paradoxical: "In psychoanalysis, nothing is true except the exaggerations." Others issue in wild generalizations: "Normality is death." Still other passages combine a knowing allusiveness (for example, to Hegel's famous dictum that Napoleon was the world spirit on horseback) with a simple image ("Hitler's robot bombs," the pilotless V-1 and V-2 missiles that killed thousands of people in London) to insinuate, in a few elliptical words, a considered view about abstract philosophical matters: "'I have seen the world spirit,' not on horseback, but on wings and without a head, and that refutes, at the same stroke, Hegel's philosophy of history." A topic that is provocatively formulated in one passage often reappears in another with a completely different, and sometimes inverted, emphasis. Adorno compared this way of writing to "spiders' webs." He hoped to snare readers in a tightly woven net of metaphors and ideas.

The distinctive features of Adorno's style owe a great deal to his rarefied upbringing. Born in Frankfurt am Main, Adorno inherited, and helped to renew, many of the most demanding currents in German high culture. Trained to become a classical pianist, he also studied sociology and philosophy before moving to Vienna in 1925 to study with the atonal composer Alban Berg. Discouraged from pursuing a career in music, he returned to Frankfurt and completed a dissertation on Kierkegaard.

Fluent in the specialized vocabularies refined by German philosophers from Kant and Hegel to Husserl and Heidegger, Adorno in these years also absorbed the key idea of reification from Marx and the Hungarian communist philosopher Georg Lukács. Capitalism, according to Marx, had produced a "topsy-turvy world" in which inanimate objects of every sort—from stocks and bonds to paintings and poems—were treated like fetishes with magical powers, while human beings were manipulated like inanimate objects, as if a laborer earning a salary was a mere tool

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with no independent mind or power. Adorno at the same time acquired a taste, which will seem rebarbative to most Anglophones, for dramatizing the wages of reification by attributing agency to impersonal nouns. (One example: "Topsy-turviness perpetuates itself: domination is propagated by the dominated.")

In 1938, old Frankfurt friends, led by Max Horkheimer, helped Adorno escape from Europe to join in research projects being organized in America by Horkheimer's transplanted Institute of Social Research (a.k.a. the Frankfurt School), based in New York City. At first he earned a living working for the Princeton Radio Research Project, commuting daily from Manhattan to Newark, New Jersey, the site of the project's headquarters. "When I traveled there through the tunnel under the Hudson," he wrote years later, summing up his sense of displacement, "I felt a little as if I were in Kafka's Nature Theater of Oklahoma." Compared with a great many less fortunate émigré academics, Adorno had a good war. In 1941, after Horkheimer had moved to Southern California for health reasons, he offered Adorno another job, this time conducting research into "the authoritarian personality." So, once again, Adorno joined his German mentor, this time in the land of palm trees, balmy breezes, and movie stars.

He hated it.

Although Southern California in the 1940s was teeming with illustrious European exiles, including Arnold Schoenberg, Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, and Igor Stravinsky, Adorno disappeared into his writing and research, repelled by the vainglory and vulgarity of the people he was expected to get along with amiably, in the American style. Outside the émigré community, Adorno's painstakingly acquired storehouse of knowledge—about modern opera, German philosophy, and the evils of the cash nexus and the commodity form—impressed no one.

"In America, I was liberated from a certain naive belief in culture," he confessed shortly before his death in 1969. In Europe, he had simply taken for granted "the fundamental importance of the mind—'Geist.'... The fact that this was not a foregone conclusion, I learned in America, where no reverential silence in the presence of everything intellectual prevailed."

Or, as he more tartly summed up the same sad experience in *Minima Moralia*, "Anyone who, in conversation, talks over the head of even one person, is tactless. For the sake of humanity talk is restricted to the most obvious, dullest, and tritest matters."

American anti-intellectualism has rarely had a more vicious critic. After completing a long collaborative essay with Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Adorno set to work with a vengeance, organizing his thoughts about the wretchedness of his émigré experience. Composed in bits and pieces throughout his time in Southern California, *Minima Moralia* is, in part, the effort of a sensitive introvert, feeling lost and bereft of proper recognition, to conjure a cocoon of "reverential silence" around the words he has obsessively strung together, as if a perfectly taut sentence could be a talisman and helpmate, like the rosary beads of a pious Catholic.

He had no expectation whatsoever that the man in the street would have the faintest clue what he was up to. He didn't care. On the contrary: "For the intellectual, inviolable isolation is now the only way of showing some measure of solidarity"—and this isolation is to be assured through the rarefied quality of one's prose.

Since Adorno obviously did not suppose that plumbers and soda jerks would be disturbing their dogmatic slumbers by laboring through his prose, what kind of reader was *Minima Moralia* meant to reach? Certainly someone who could pick up, and perhaps even find pleasure in, his many allusions (starting with the title, a play on *Magna Moralia*, a digest of maxims and ethical arguments attributed in antiquity to Aristotle), and probably, too, a reader who shared something of his overwhelming disgust for modern-day popular culture.

But there are also hints that Adorno was appealing to a still-higher court of judgment. In a fragment on intellectual history, after surveying the damage done to Nietzsche's reputation by his posthumous popularity among neofascist bands of "Noble Human Beings and other riff-raff," Adorno concludes that "even at that time the hope of leaving behind messages in bottles on the flood of barbarism bursting on Europe was an amiable illusion." The great solitary thinker, who had "wondered whether anyone was listening when he sang to himself in 'a secret bacarole,'" had suffered a fate worse than death: His work had become the plaything of ignoble fools. "Who, in the end, is to take it amiss if even the freest of free spirits no longer write for an imaginary posterity...but only for the dead God?"

Adorno's hidden premise seems to be this: Any serious piece of writing, like any serious work of art, will be produced from the standpoint (in a mystical image borrowed from Walter Benjamin) of "the messianic light." Like Benjamin, Adorno wants "to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption"—an emancipated point of view, beyond the despair of living under the rules of capitalism. Insofar as such a work succeeds in single-mindedly addressing its proper audience, it may well be understood properly by no one—save the Messiah (who, of course, may never appear).

IT IS IN THIS FRANKLY eschatological context, weirdly conjoined with what Jürgen Habermas once characterized as "self-affirmation gone wild," that Adorno most eloquently sums up his views on rhetoric in the fragment that Butler cites. It is titled "Morality and style."

"It avails nothing ascetically to avoid all technical expressions, all allusions to spheres of culture that no longer exist," Adorno declares. "The logic of the day, which makes so much of its clarity, has naively adopted this perverted notion of everyday speech." (One can see here the roots of his postwar antipathy to the ordinary-language philosophy of Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin.) "Rigorous formulation" requires of a reader "conceptual effort," which Americans, with their dim-witted commitment to a superficial pragmatism (another one of Adorno's bêtes noires), will "violently resist." He adds: "Only what they do not need first to understand, they consider understandable; only the word coined by commerce, and really alienated, touches them as familiar. Few things contribute so much to the demoralization of intellectuals. Those who would escape it must recognize the advocates of communicability as traitors to what they communicate."

Since Adorno made no bones about his lack of interest in defining his terms or presenting a sequential argument ("In the emphatic essay thought divests itself of the traditional idea of truth"), it is worth pausing over three claims that can be distinguished in this remarkable fragment.

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1 "It avails nothing ascetically to avoid all technical expressions." Serious writing sometimes requires jargon: the sorts of terms that circulate in any highly evolved science. It would be absurd to demand of a physicist like Einstein or Bohr that he write in prose intelligible to the layman. In Adorno's eyes, German philosophy has some claim to the title of science, and it certainly has evolved its own glossary of technical terms. Just because a bunch of American yahoos have never read Kant and Hegel is no reason to abandon an exacting vocabulary.

2 "It avails nothing ascetically to avoid...all allusions to spheres of culture that no longer exist." Seriously artful writing sometimes requires a license to range freely, drawing without inhibition on a rich store of cultural references, no matter how esoteric. It would be absurd to demand of a poet like Rilke or T.S. Eliot that he write lines that any old reader can appreciate. Adorno is a highly cultivated individual, a cosmopolitan, a musician of the mind. Just because a bunch of American yahoos have never read Goethe or listened to Alban Berg is no reason to give up referring to works by such artists, both classical and modern. Indeed, anyone aware of what modernism has wrought in the fine arts will feel further emboldened to reject, in a typically modernist declaration of independence, "conventional surface coherence, the appearance of harmony, the order corroborated merely by replication."

3 "Only what they do not need first to understand, they consider understandable; only the word coined by commerce, and really alienated, touches them as familiar." Under capitalist relations of production, human beings exist in a state of alienation. Much of what they think they know must pass through a process of exchange, in which writers working for large corporations premasticate ideas, arguments, and the events of the day, and then deliver this information in measured portions to a starved and stunted public desperate for distraction and indifferent as to whether it is devouring thin gruel or a real meal. Pari passu, under current social conditions, as these are regulated by capitalism and the commodity form, truly unpopular writing willy-nilly becomes a locus of resistance to the powers that be: "He who offers for sale something unique that no-one wants to buy, represents, even against his will, freedom from exchange."

THEODOR ADORNO

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Adorno complained that in America, "for the sake of humanity talk is restricted to the most obvious, dullest, and tritest matters."

Under these circumstances, the ideal of "universal communicability" is a sinister "liberal fiction," one that surreptitiously assumes the desirability of a "complete conformism." When even educated souls have internalized the "detritus" of a "barbarous culture—half-learning, slackness, heavy familiarity, coarseness"—the "desire to be understood by others" can only reinforce the "downward urge of the intellect." "Retention of strangeness is the only antidote to estrangement."

Q.E.D.: The most radical critic of alienation will be the most exquisitely aloof thinker, incomprehensible and unpopular by design, as if enraptured by his unswerving address to an ideal audience of one: a God who may not exist.

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IT IS NOT TOO HARD TO guess what Orwell would have made of *Minima Moralia* had he been able to read it. The scathing social criticism and the longing for a truly independent movement for social change, Orwell would, of course, have recognized and welcomed. But the style of Adorno's work would have offended all of Orwell's deepest literary instincts.

"Good prose is like a window pane," he once declared. True to this motto, he never stopped looking for the right frame for the right kinds of concrete images and turns of phrase, artfully enough rendered to conjure an illusion of perfect transparency.

That he was staggeringly successful in reaching the largest possible public, in a way that very few twentieth-century writers have been, is indicated by a few simple facts. As Paul Berman has summed them up in one long sentence: "The writer who coined 'Hate Week,' 'Thought crime,' 'Thought Police,' 'vaporize,' 'Newspeak,' 'doublespeak,' 'Some are more equal than others,' and 'Big Brother is Watching You' has sold, between *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, more than 40 million books in sixty languages which is, according to John Rodden, 'more than any pair of books by a serious or popular postwar author.'"

Orwell's views on politics and language were deeply shaped by his experience as the son of a British official in the Indian civil service. Christened Eric Arthur Blair, the boy was groomed to follow in his father's imperial footsteps. By the mid-1920s, while Adorno was in Vienna studying music with Berg, Blair was in Burma working for the police. In 1927, the year Adorno began his graduate studies in philosophy, Blair, renouncing his father's colonialism and resigning his police post, began to tramp around France and England, washing dishes in a Paris hotel, harvesting hops in Kent, and observing coal mining in the north of England. While keeping a diary of the injustices he witnessed, Blair discovered his vocation.

He would be a man of letters. He would "make political writing into an art." And he would make the world listen.

Diffident in private, Blair so feared failure in the literary marketplace that he invented a pseudonym for the book he wrote based on his diaries, *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Criticism would be directed at George Orwell, not Eric Blair. But since the book, when published in 1933, was a literary success, Eric Blair became George Orwell.

If the key experience behind Adorno's critique of mass society was his miserable exile in Southern California, Orwell's political epiphany could not have been more different. It happened in 1937 in Spain, where Orwell went to fight on the Republican side in the civil war against the fascists and to file reports for *The New Leader*. Enlisted in a Catalan militia organized by POUM (the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), he was seriously wounded at the front and sent back to Barcelona to recover. There, Orwell was witness to a murderous power struggle between the Spanish communists and the independent left, which in Catalonia consisted largely of anarchists and Trotskyists (who dominated POUM).

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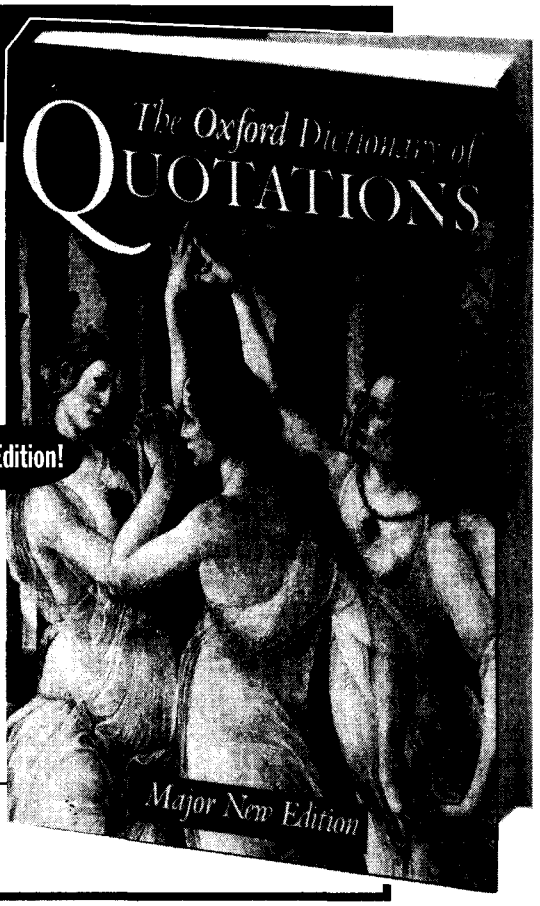

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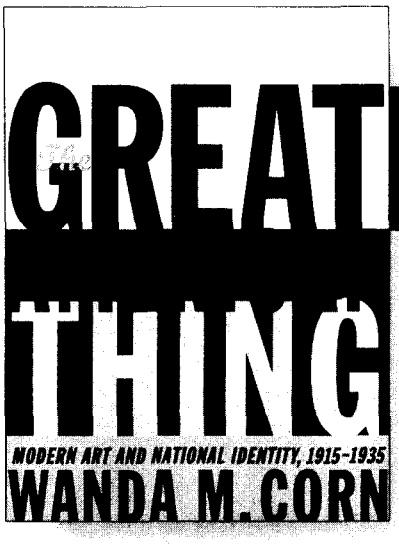
At the core of Orwell's writing is his obsessive concern with factual truth. "Good prose is like a window pane," he once declared.

In the course of this struggle, the communists falsely accused the Trotskyists of plotting with Franco. Determined to expose the lie, Orwell gathered documents and took notes for his great book on the civil war, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). The experience left him with an admiration for the independent left and a hatred of the communists. A decade later, he claimed: "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it."

Orwell's literary and political convictions only deepened with the passage of time. A political pariah by the time World War II broke out, Orwell tried to join the British army but was declared medically unfit (he seems to have suffered from tuberculosis, the likely cause of his premature death in 1950). Still anxious to lend his talents to the war effort, he took a position at the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1941, producing radio talks for the Indian section of the BBC Eastern Service, submitting himself to government censorship in order to make a contribution to the battle against fascism, writing news scripts, and broadcasting his sophisticated blend of political commentary and Allied propaganda. During the war he also served as a literary editor and columnist for the *Tribune*, a weekly newspaper with an editorial board headed by Aneurin Bevan, the Labour Party leftist who would become a chief architect of Britain's National Health Service after the war.

As the war went on and he developed a firsthand understanding of the difficulty in conveying facts and political ideals to the largest possible audience, his views hardened on the question of what Adorno had called "morality and style." For his wartime work, Orwell knew full well that critics would accuse him "of being an intellectual snob who wants to 'talk down to' the masses" or suspect him of "plotting to establish an English Gestapo." But he felt certain that he was on the right path, helping to establish the linguistic preconditions for a deeper democracy. "Some day we may have a genuine democratic government," he wrote in 1944, "a government which will want to tell people what is happening, and what must be done next, and what sacrifices are necessary, and why. It will need the mechanisms for doing so, of which the first are the right words, the right tone of voice."

In 1946, Orwell summed up his views in a short essay titled "Why I Write." In a passage of characteristically disarming



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bluntness, he listed four major reasons: (1) "sheer egoism," the wish to be noticed; (2) "aesthetic enthusiasm," the pure pleasure in arranging words in finely formed sentences; (3) "historical impulse," the desire to bear witness to events and "to find out true facts and store them up for the use of posterity"; and (4) "political purpose," the drive to "push the world in a certain direction."

To satisfy these ambitions, Orwell needed readers, the more the better. "My initial concern is to get a hearing," he wrote. Neither his egoism nor his sense of political purpose could be gratified in any other way. What provoked his greatest works, from *Homage to Catalonia* in 1938 to *Animal Farm* in 1945 and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949, was his sense of moral outrage: at the mendaciousness of the communists; at the barbarism of the Nazis; at the politically motivated obfuscation produced by the liars in every party. The bigger the audience he could reach, the more lies he could expose, the deeper his political impact would be.

AT THE CORE OF ORWELL'S writing was his obsessive concern for factual truth, which, he could see, was an infinitely fragile thing, forever susceptible to the kinds of lies favored by those in power. Orwell's fixation may seem self-explanatory to anyone raised within the conventions of Anglo-American philosophy. But to a great many Continental philosophers, the empiricist assumption that there exists a pre-theoretical world of facts just waiting to be described seems hopelessly naive. For the past two centuries, almost all of Germany's most eminent philosophers have subscribed to some version of the Kantian view that—in Hannah Arendt's formulation—"truth is neither given to nor disclosed to but produced by the human mind."

The philosophical issues at stake here are too complex to summarize briefly. Suffice it to say that Arendt herself was virtually unique, among German thinkers of her generation, in her refusal to give up the meaning of truth "in the sense in which men commonly understand it"—that is, as factual truth. Indeed, Arendt was, if anything, even more alarmed than Orwell about the fate of this form of truth: "The chances of factual truth surviving the onslaught of power are very slim indeed; it is always in danger of being maneuvered out of the world not only for a time but, potentially, forever."

Orwell, for his part, felt that his obligation to factual truth trumped even his unrelenting preoccupation with the style of his prose—or, for that matter, his loyalty to any particular political cause. In one of the longest chapters in *Homage to Catalonia,* he marshaled his evidence of communist treachery with the painstaking thoroughness of a prosecutor at the bar of justice, knowing, as he later conceded, that he ran a risk of turning an otherwise lyrical piece of writing into a tedious exercise in topical journalism. "I could not have done otherwise," he explained: "I happened to know, what very few people in England had been allowed to know, that innocent men were being falsely accused. If I had not been angry about that I should never have written the book."

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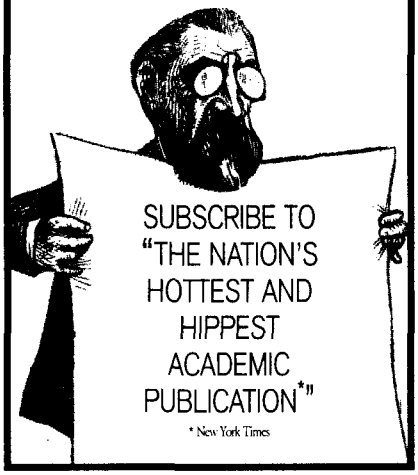

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Members of the Frankfurt School were horrified by the "fetishization" of facts. Adorno compared investigative journalism to Fascism.

His erstwhile allies on the British left did not share Orwell's anger, arguing that the only hope for a Republican victory was a unified alliance under communist control. And potential allies elsewhere did not always share Orwell's fierce commitment to the direct statement of factual truths. Indeed, members of the Frankfurt School were horrified by the "fetishization" of facts that they saw in the logical positivism of the Vienna circle, the value-free social science of the American university, and the "tell it like it is" school of newspaper journalism. The problem was not only that a narrow emphasis on external facts sometimes obscured the mind's role in framing concepts (as Adorno protested, "something merely factual cannot be conceived without a concept, because to think it is always already to conceive it"); it was also that it obstructed the task of social criticism. In *Minima Moralia,* Adorno charged that the effort, so characteristic of Anglo-American investigative reporting, to give readers "the facts full in the face" succumbed to "the form and timbre of the command issued under Fascism by the dumb to the silent." For those who wished to achieve a measure of "comprehensibility to the most stupid" (as Adorno sarcastically put it), the critical theorist—in this respect indistinguishable from a Prussian autocrat—expressed nothing but contempt.

The contrast with Orwell could not be more stark. Whereas Adorno deployed a sophisticated philosophical framework, Orwell stressed brute facts. Whereas Adorno strove for modernist complexity, Orwell aimed at demotic simplicity. And even as Adorno was abjuring any effort to address a large audience of ordinary people, Orwell had bet his political and literary life on doing just that.

MANY INTELLECTUALS ON THE left today regard both Orwell and Adorno as hopelessly compromised figures, whatever their views on the politics of language and the morality of style.

Orwell's political sins were manifold: He disapproved of birth control, he was a Blimpish sort of British patriot, and (as one Web site put it in a warning against taking "Politics and the English Language" too seriously), he collaborated "with the B.B.C. against fascists in India in World War II, and wrote...in part to justify the work his journalism had done—for the Empire." Last year, controversy flared again over the fact that Orwell, shortly before his death, jotted down a list of people he regarded as politically compromised by their sympathy for

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Stalin and had it conveyed to the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office.

Adorno's case is almost equally vexed. There are some pretty strange lines in *Minima Moralia*—for example, "Totalitarianism and homosexuality belong together." In recent years, proponents of cultural studies have ridiculed Adorno's uninformed ranting about the evils of jazz and popular music. And then there is the matter of the great man's truly awe-inspiring capacity for contemplative passivity. This is someone (unlike his fellow critical theorist Herbert Marcuse) who steadfastly refused to be drawn into taking concrete positions on matters of pressing political importance. One of his oldest friends from Frankfurt, Leo Lowenthal (who ended up as a professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley), has said that Adorno had a simple motto: "Don't participate."

Orwell's political errors may well comfort academic critics of "left conservatism." But what about Adorno? For all his sins, can Adorno nonetheless be enlisted in the defense of the contemporary university?

Let us examine the arguments presented in Butler's letter to the *London Review of Books*, by taking in turn the three claims that are implicit in Adorno's fragment on "Morality and style."

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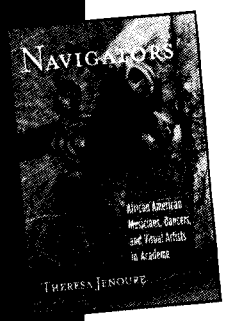

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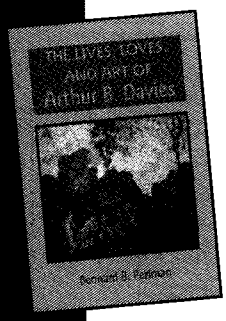

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1 In the matter of "technical expressions," a sympathetic reader must give Butler the benefit of the doubt. Like Adorno, today's critical theorists have steeped themselves in the vocabulary of German philosophy, from Kant and Hegel to Husserl and Heidegger, augmented by an infusion of terms from more recent French philosophers, especially Foucault. Jargon that is intolerable to a general reader is not only a source of power; it is also a convenient shorthand for conveying the results of inquiry in most academic disciplines, from physics to sociology, and not excepting feminist theory, literary criticism, and cultural studies.

At the same time, an unsympathetic reader is liable to feel put upon, if not bamboozled, by the constant barrage of technical terms found in the work of Butler and other contemporary theorists, such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Quite often, one cannot help but suspect that this is a deliberate ploy, allowing the writer to accuse any critic of uncomprehending idiocy. Adorno himself once observed that "the thicket is no sacred grove. There is a duty to clarify all difficulties that result merely from esoteric complacency." Referring to Heidegger's prose, he complained that "he lays around himself the taboo that any understanding would simultaneously be falsification."

2 Adorno's staunch defense of the writer's right to deploy a dense network of cultural references that is liable to be appreciated by a relatively small number of people seems, on the whole, both reasonable and just. Anyone who has labored in the mass media knows that there is relentless pressure to dumb down every word of every sentence. Adorno's defiant display of erudition, by contrast, is a bracing rebuke to the ignorance and sharply diminished attention span of a great many ordinary readers and pundits, not to mention the blinkered narrowness of a great many university professors.

However, few writers, be they poets, scholars, or journalists, possess a mind as well furnished as that of Adorno. Certainly few contemporary exponents of radical theory, Butler included, share his devotion to European high culture. His allusiveness is so pure, and so rooted in a specifically European sensibility, that it has been successfully emulated by only a handful of

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> Adorno himself once observed that "the thicket is no sacred grove. There is a duty to clarify all difficulties that result merely from esoteric complacency."

Americans—Susan Sontag, in her best essays of the 1960s and early 1970s, comes to mind, as does T.J. Clark, in his recent book, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes From a History of Modernism.*

3 Adorno's last claim—that a style of writing comprehensible to only a few readers stands the best chance of evading the alienation of being turned into a mass-market commodity under conditions of capitalist production—is both the most radical and the hardest to know how to apply in practice. Apart from demonstrable inaccessibility, coupled with a lack of popularity, it is not clear how one is supposed to judge success, or failure, in this paradoxical venture. It is also not entirely clear from her references to Adorno whether Butler fully agrees with his position, at least in its most radical articulation in *Minima Moralia*. On the one hand, she agrees that resistance to capitalism requires the refusal of received opinions cheerfully expressed in smugly measured periods. On the other hand, she holds out greater hope than Adorno does for the possibility of constructive social activism.

In her letter to the *London Review*, before quoting *Minima Moralia*, Butler praises Spivak in terms Adorno would recognize—as a brave voice in the cultural wilderness. But in the same letter, she marvels at the sheer size of Spivak's readership and even claims that the "wide-ranging audience for Spivak's work proves that spoon-feeding is less appreciated than forms of activist thinking and writing."

While Butler may hope by endorsing Adorno's position to justify her style of writing, and that of countless other left academics, she cannot have it both ways. Either a key criterion of a truly radical theory is its austere indifference to being widely "appreciated," or it is not. If the criterion of a truly radical theory is its inaccessibility and consequent evasion of the cash nexus (Adorno's basic position in *Minima Moralia*), then a theory advertised as radical that nevertheless reaches a "wide-ranging audience" under conditions of commodity production must, ipso facto, not be truly radical.

Or consider another paradox of Adorno's position: If (in a typically exaggerated formulation) a literary "retention of strangeness is the only antidote to estrangement," then when the language becomes familiar, the antidote must lose its potency. (An overdose, even of critical theory, may prove fatal for the free spirit.)

Does this mean that Adorno's and Butler's most challenging ideas, precisely because of their relative popularity among a not-insignificant number of left-leaning intellectuals, have lost their antithetical use value and, by the infernal logic of exchange, been alienated and perhaps even dialectically transformed—turned into something hackneyed and predictable? If one accepts Adorno's position in *Minima Moralia*, there is no escaping the conclusion.

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THREE YEARS AGO, KATHA Pollitt summed up the problem with esoteric writing as a radical gesture in a world without real radical alternatives. When intellectuals on the left write in a way that excludes "all but the initiated few," she remarked, what almost inevitably results is "a pseudo-politics, in which everything is claimed in the name of revolution and democracy and equality and anti-authoritarianism, and nothing is risked, nothing, except maybe a bit of harmless cross-dressing, is even expected to happen outside the classroom."

Adorno himself was characteristically unapologetic about the apolitical consequences of his ultraradical critical theory: "Concrete and positive suggestions for change merely strengthen [the power of the status quo], either as ways of administering the unadministratable, or by calling down repression from the monstrous totality itself."

Orwell, by contrast, had little anxiety about making political suggestions, the more concretely put the better. "If you simplify your [language]," he wrote in 1946, "you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy"—even the orthodoxies of a purer-than-pure critical theory. "You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself."

Of course, it is dispiriting, particularly for anyone on the left, to be reminded that some things, including this debate, never change. But the next time one of our latter-day critical theorists attacks the desire for plain talk as a Trojan horse for "left conservatism," I suggest a thought experiment. Imagine poor old Adorno rolling over in his grave, still waiting for a messiah who may never come. And then picture Orwell, the "Maggot of the Month," as the communists used to call him, doubled over in laughter and delighted to discover a brand-new oxymoron being deployed as a rhetorical weapon of perfectly Orwellian proportions.

James Miller is professor of political science and director of liberal studies at the Graduate Faculty of the New School. His books include *Democracy Is in the Streets, The Passion of Michel Foucault*, and, most recently, *Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll, 1947-77* (Simon & Schuster).

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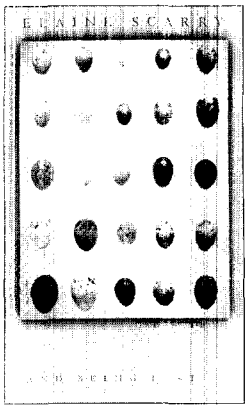

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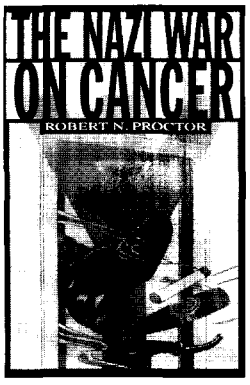

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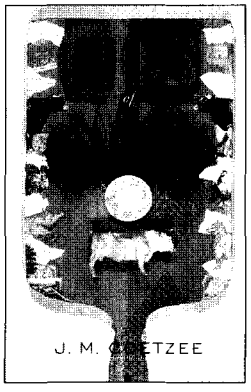

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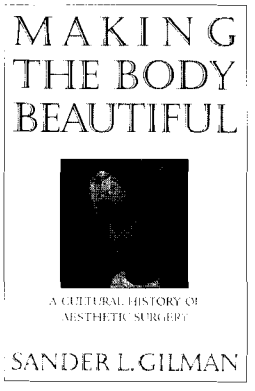

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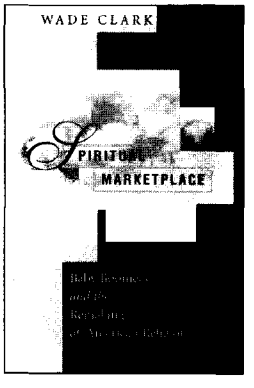

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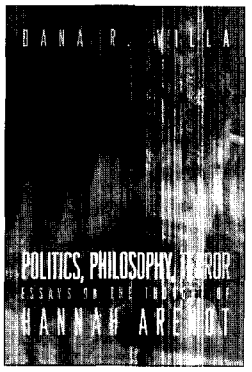

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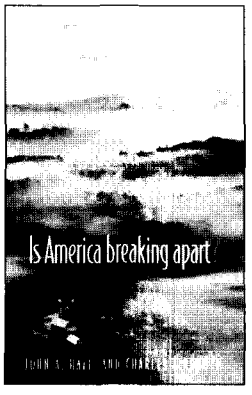

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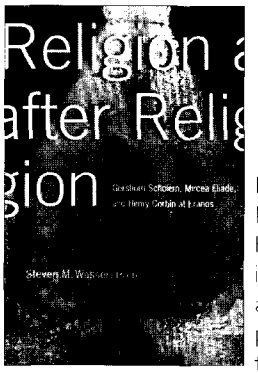

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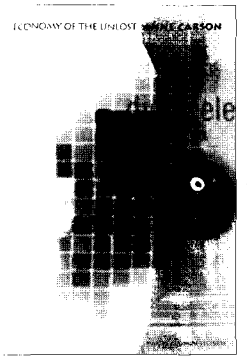

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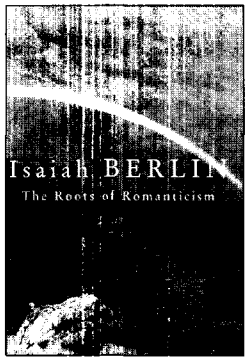

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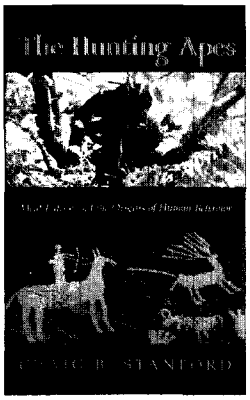

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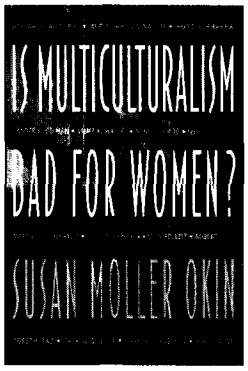

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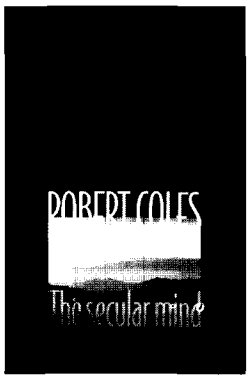

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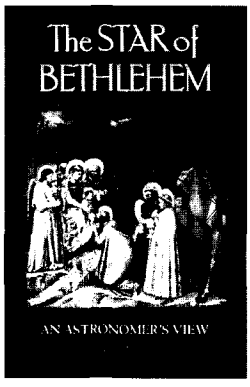

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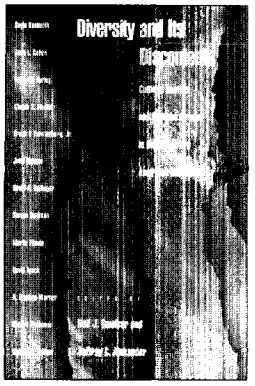

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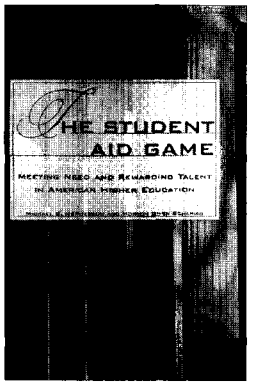

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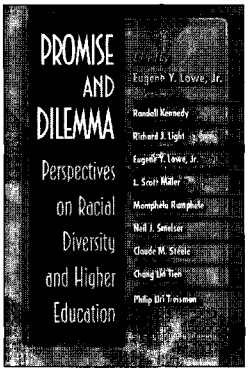

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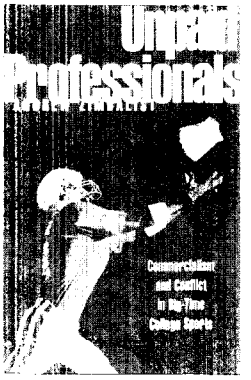

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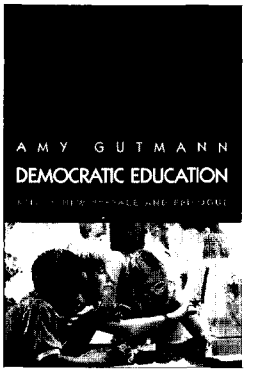

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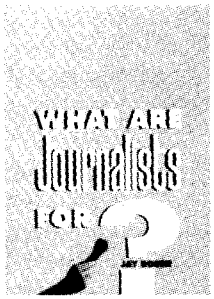

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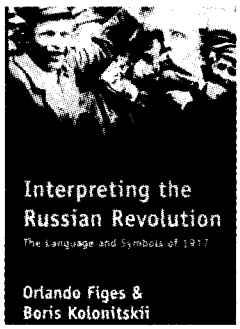

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THE POSTMODERN MISSION

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IS DECONSTRUCTION THE LAST BEST HOPE OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS?

BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN

INTERVARSITY PRESS IS ONE OF THE nation's most esteemed publishers of evangelical Protestant books. As its name suggests, when InterVarsity was founded in 1947, its target audience consisted of college students, whom its editors sought to educate about traditional Christianity and to provide with aids for Bible study. These days, the press is flourishing: With annual sales of $10 million, InterVarsity has reached out to an academic and general audience with books that sell in superstores as well as in Christian bookstores. But for all its marketplace success, InterVarsity requires that its authors hew to certain doctrinal lines: They must recognize the authority and divine inspiration of the Bible, the divinity of Jesus Christ, and other mainstays of traditional Christian belief.

No wonder, then, that many of InterVarsity's readers were shocked when the press started to dabble in the controversial field of postmodernist theology in the mid-1990s. Postmodernism, whose notoriously elusive presumptions generally include a suspicion of both master narratives and claims to universal truth, would seem sharply at variance with the traditional Christian teaching that God definitively reveals himself to humankind in the Bible and that Christ is the only means to salvation. Although postmodernism's influence may be waning in the secular literature departments that helped spawn it, in evangelical circles it is still gaining ground, every inch of which is fiercely contested.

One of InterVarsity's most controversial essay collections, edited by Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm, both of whom teach theology at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, is *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (1995). The book starts from the premise that a changed world, increasingly suspicious of claims to objectivity, calls for a new, less doctrinal approach to spreading the Gospel. One author, Philip Kenneson, a theology and philosophy professor at Milligan College in Tennessee, contributed an essay with the red-flag title "There's No Such Thing As Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing, Too"—an allusion to the famous essay "There's No Such Thing As Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too" by the postmodernist gadfly Stanley Fish. Another InterVarsity experiment in postmodernism is *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (1995), an attempt to apply a "deconstructionist scalpel" to the Bible by J. Richard Middleton, an assistant professor at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, and Brian J. Walsh, a Christian Reformed chaplain at the University of Toronto. And then there's *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (1997), a guide for proselytizing today's youth by Jimmy Long, the regional director of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

According to a survey that both Long and the editors of *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* cite, "only 28 percent of Americans have a strong belief in 'absolute truth,' and...a corresponding relativism is on the rise." Asks Long, "What effect does that indicator have on our ministry?" Evangelicals will need to "emphasize living the truth versus only talking about the truth. The lives of Christians will become more important to seekers as evidence to use in deciding whether or not to follow Christ." Performativity, it would seem, has reached the pulpit.

However tame by the standards of your average comparative literature department, these forays into the fragmented world of postmodern uncertainties by a leading

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Christian press, a leading Christian youth ministry, and several leading Christian colleges, have suggested to some critics that the evangelical academic establishment is losing its faith. In a blistering 1996 monograph, *Contours of Postmaturity: InterVarsity Press Comes of Age*, Douglas Wilson, a forty-six-year-old pastor in Moscow, Idaho, aired his views on a range of InterVarsity titles. All these books "exhibit exegetical skylarking in *excelsis*," Wilson complained.

In fact, Wilson is only one of many critics to take aim at InterVarsity's recent academic offerings, accusing the highly conservative press of becoming, in effect, the religious Routledge. The debate has crystallized a number of pressing issues for the evangelical community as its relatively new scholarly tradition endeavors to set down permanent roots. What exactly should be the stance of Christian academia toward secular intellectual trends? Can such trends be Christianized—used to critique the Enlightenment-derived Western tendency to elevate "objective" scientific reasoning over all other modes of knowing, including those that come from faith? Or do Christian experiments in fashionable academic theory simply betray an excessive willingness to assimilate to secularism and ultimately a lack of confidence in Christianity?

As InterVarsity Press makes room for postmodern theology in its publishing program, observers of the conservative Christian intellectual scene worry that such a trend reflects other, far-reaching changes in evangelical college curricula and student life. Have evangelical colleges become too liberal? Too worldly? Too relativist? In an acerbic article for the paleoconservative magazine *Chronicles*, Wilson blasted evangelical institutions for teaching "postmodern whimwham" and letting down the home-schooling parents who naively send their children to them. Wrote Wilson, "A graduate of an evangelical establishment like Wheaton has a far better chance of receiving a diploma in trendy leftism than his counterpart down the road at Leviathan State U."

THE BATTLE over postmodernism and other liberal trends at Christian colleges is, as much as anything, a battle over who owns traditional Christianity in America. To many outsiders, "fundamentalist" and "evangelical" seem like interchangeable words, but in the stricter sense, fundamentalists are only those who adhere to an early-twentieth-century Protestant movement that enforced a traditionalist, often literal interpretation of the Bible. Evangelicals, on the other hand, follow the example of Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875), the father of the Second Great Awakening. Finney's movement took less interest in creedal niceties than it did in revivals, vows of personal reform, and public, emotion-laden commitments to faith. Today, "evangelical" loosely refers to Christians of any denomination who accept the Bible's authority (although not necessarily literally), believe salvation comes through Jesus Christ, and evangelize, or boldly spread the Gospel.

At the start of the twentieth century, conservative Christians of all stripes kept

THE HOME TEAM

In the last decade, parents across the country, alienated by public school bureaucracies or a secular culture's perceived hostility to religion, have increasingly opted to educate their kids at home. This year alone, some 1.5 million children are being home schooled, and as they grow older, their parents will be faced with a pressing question: What to do when their kids reach college age? For those parents who subscribe to conservative brands of Christianity, the increasing worldliness of evangelical colleges makes the question all the more difficult to answer.

Michael Farris—president of the Home School Legal Defense Association, archconservative lawyer, minister, and former treasurer of the Committee to Draft Pat Robertson for President—has a solution. He is the founder of Patrick Henry College, the first American college to cater especially to home-schooled children. Farris's school, which will open its doors to a hundred students next fall, presents itself as a blend of religious liberal arts college and political boot camp: The curriculum is heavy on the Old and New Testaments, as well as on Christian interpretations of the Western canon—"Dead, white, European males won't get bad press at Patrick Henry," says Farris. But the only major on offer is in government, and students will supplement their readings of Aristotle and Racine with courses on foreign policy, economics, and constitutional law.

In fact, Patrick Henry's primary objective is to prepare the next generation of conservative Christian lawyers, congressional staffers, and political activists. Located in Purcellville, Virginia, some fifty miles west of Washington, D.C., the school will offer an apprenticeship program in which students will perform research projects for congressmen and public-policy organizations. "The value of sending fifty young people each year to Capitol Hill with excellent skills and unshakable convictions cannot be overstated. They will have a significant influence on the direction of public policy in this nation," proclaims the school's glossy brochure.

Indeed, Farris asserts, the inspiration behind the college was the frequency with which conservative congressmen requested home-schooled students to serve as staffers. "They wanted someone who was academically prepared and shared their values, [and] there was the assumption that home-schooled kids do that," he says. Like these politicians, Farris believes that home-schooled children are more intelligent, passionate, and directed than their chalkboard-scribbling counterparts.

Furthermore, Farris contends, home-schooled Christians possess a preternatural sense of discipline. There will be no raging keg parties at Patrick Henry, nor, for that matter, will there be dating, which Farris considers "serial infidelity." Farris wants to mold adults who can "travel through a political campaign with their Christian testimony intact," and so each student will be supervised by a mentor with a firm grasp of Christian values, replicating the sort of one-on-one interaction that makes home schooling an attractive option for parents in the first place.

At the same time, Farris is eager to avoid any charges of insularity at Patrick Henry. The school's promotional material warns prospective students that they must have "high levels of

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INFURIATED BY POSTMODERN THEORY, CRITICS ACCUSE INTERVARSITY PRESS OF BECOMING, IN EFFECT, THE RELIGIOUS ROUTLEDGE.

a low profile. Liberal Protestants and religious skeptics regarded evangelicals and fundamentalists as backward and anti-intellectual; and conservative Christians were roundly ridiculed during the Scopes trial of 1925. Not until the 1950s did American evangelicalism come of age, thanks to the revival crusades of the country's most famous evangelical, Billy Graham. Contrary to popular belief, evangelicalism and political conservatism did not rise in tandem. The evangelical community's first concerted political act was to support a Democrat, Jimmy Carter, for president in 1976. It was not until Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson endorsed Ronald Reagan four years later that the word "evangelical" became coterminous in the public mind with the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition.

Perhaps the most enduring evangelical stereotype, and the one most at odds with anything considered postmodern, is that of the stern, clean-living Bible-thumper who adamantly disapproves of the loose morals of secular society. For evangelicals who wish to insulate themselves or their children from the open sexuality and vulgarity of contemporary American culture, evangelical colleges have provided enclaves of pious living. But lately, even within these enclaves, times are changing.

Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for instance, once banned movies. Today, it sponsors an on-campus Christian film festival. The same college now allows openly gay students to enroll, and it has long since lifted its prohibition on dancing, which the Reformed tradition's sixteenth-century founder, John Calvin, had condemned for arousing the passions and leading to lasciviousness. Elsewhere on evangelical campuses, Christian and not-so-Christian rock blares from boom boxes; baggy pants and baseball caps are common attire; and teachers and drinking-age students can find discreet off-campus places where they can booze in moderation without repercussions. Although most of the nation's 120 or so self-styled Christian liberal arts colleges still forbid liquor on campus, and while many still have conduct codes, daily chapel, once a widespread requirement, is largely a thing of the past.

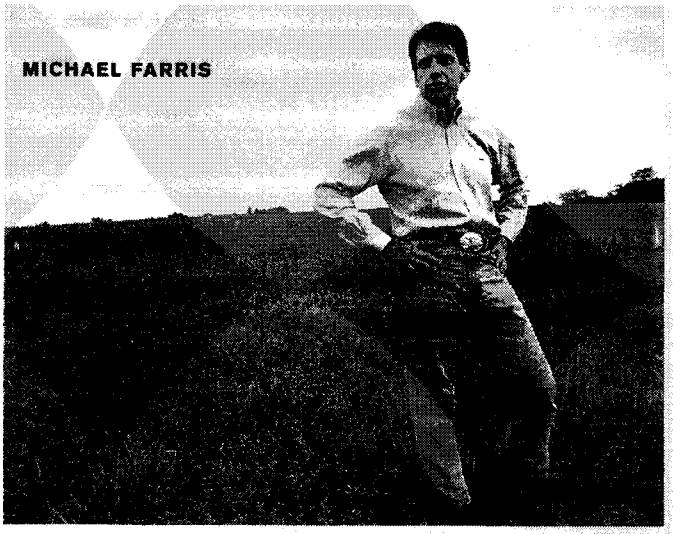
All this is happening as Christian college enrollments are in the midst of an unprecedented boom. The number of undergraduates at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota, for example, has soared from nineteen hundred to twenty-four hundred since 1994. The very success of the evangelical schools—and their new and adaptability" and will be expected to interact with a larger world "that includes people with perspectives hostile to the Christian faith and family." Farris plans to hold "town-hall meetings," weekly gatherings at which students will be encouraged to discuss their ideas and to which representatives of liberal organizations will be invited to share their views. This will ensure that Patrick Henry students will have "bumped into the other side before," so they won't be blindsided by their first run-in with Congressman Barney Frank.

Farris's own 1993 campaign for lieutenant governor of Virginia provides an object lesson in the pitfalls of preaching to the converted. Farris alienated many voters with his extreme views. He advised all Christian parents to remove their children from the public school system, which he labeled "a godless monstrosity." An outspoken defender of school prayer, a vigorous attacker of homosexual rights, and an advocate of women's "duty to be a loving and submissive aid to their husbands," Farris is not universally popular within the Christian home-schooling community. When the *Washington Post* referred to him as the "father of home-schooling," one angry letter writer shot back, "[Farris] does not speak for me, nor does he speak for the many, many home-schoolers across the nation who do not share or appreciate his politics, his agendas, his theology, his tactics, or his personal style."

Critics of Patrick Henry are not persuaded that the town hall meetings will suffice to combat the apparent closed-mindedness of the college's founder. The image of a lone American Civil Liberties Union representative addressing a roomful of ardent, precocious Christian youths, tugging on their ideological chains, seems more a secular version of Daniel in the lion's den than a path to authentic mind broadening. True, students will learn about "the other side," but, according to Farris, they'll study evolution in order to "explain why it's wrong." Says Mark Rozell, a professor of politics at Catholic University, "When do these students get out, enter the mainstream, and engage with people unlike themselves?"

For his part, Farris remains unfazed. His chief concern? The celebrated arrogance of home-schooled students. "They start to believe their press," he admits with concern. "They start to think they are so much better than public school kids."

BENJAMIN SOSKIS



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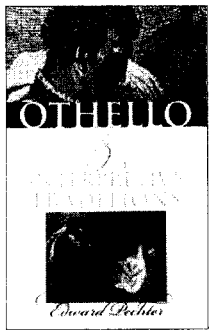

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DAILY CHAPEL, ONCE A WIDESPREAD REQUIREMENT ON EVANGELICAL CAMPUSES, IS LARGELY A THING OF THE PAST.

improved image—has engendered widespread fear that they are sliding down the slippery slope to secularism, as Harvard, Duke, the University of Chicago, and other prestigious institutions formerly linked to Protestant denominations did during the nineteenth century.

Nearly all evangelical college administrators have read the Notre Dame professor George M. Marsden's *The Soul of the American University* (Oxford, 1994), which argues that Harvard and its ilk paid too dear a price for academic quality. In accommodating themselves to the outside world, they evolved from avowedly religious to outright antireligious, going so far as to abjure the spiritual in classrooms and scholarly publications. Fears that Calvin, Wheaton, and Bethel may be the next century's Harvard, Yale, and Princeton have turned postmodernist scholarship and controversial class assignments into causes célèbres for those who worry about secularization at Christian schools. If Derrida is in the classroom, can the devil be far behind?

POSTMODERNIST evangelicals hardly see their work as contributing to a trend toward secularization. Rather, they argue that the postmodern era, whether evangelicals like it or not, has simply arrived. In 1994 a group of evangelical institutions—Wheaton College, InterVarsity Press, and the National Association of Evangelicals, among them—held a conference at Wheaton to "address contemporary issues from the perspective of revelation for the purpose of helping the church." Out of this meeting came the volume *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*.

Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm, the editors of *Christian Apologetics*, explain the premises of the conference succinctly: "Diversity of values and beliefs has become a societal virtue, infecting every part of our lives and respecting no one creed or religion. In fact, the old 'rules' by which everyone seemed to play are vanishing." If Christians ignore this new circumstance, they risk obsolescence in a world where the belief in universal norms of rationality is no longer persuasive. Rather, they must adapt to a society where storytelling counts for more than syllogisms, even as they combat the relativist heresy that every story is just as good as every other. In the absence of a widely accepted notion of truth, writes Stanley Hauerwas, an iconoclastic Protestant theologian at the Duke Divinity

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School, "The crucial question is how we can make the story we believe to be true not only compelling for us but for the whole world—a world caught between such unhappy alternative stories."

While no postmodernists, Hauerwas and the conservative Catholic philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre have been gurus for churchly poststructuralists. Both thinkers believe that American Protestantism has been harmed by its long dalliance with the Enlightenment notion of reason. In the past, says Hauerwas, "evangelicals have bought into the Enlightenment presumption that the facts are out there. It comes from the Protestant heresy of *sola scriptura,* the presumption that the individual citizen can read the Bible without the mediation of the church."

The postmodernist evangelicals agree that traditional evangelicals do their cause damage by clinging to such notions of objectivity. Philip Kenneson, once a protégé of Hauerwas's at Duke and the author of "There's No Such Thing As Objective Truth," would go further. Approvingly citing the pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, Kenneson states that a postmodern evangelicalism should do away with the problem of truth altogether. "In short, because I have neither a theory of truth nor an epistemology, I cannot have a relativistic one of either. My point is that Christians need not continue to answer the 'truth question,' and the sooner we see that we needn't, the sooner we can get on with the business of being Christians, which in no way entails accepting a certain philosophical account of truth, justification, and 'reality.'"

Kenneson proposes instead that Christians should understand "beliefs and convictions" not as "second-class knowledge" but as "habits of acting." Then the very act of living by the Christian faith will give Christian beliefs all the intelligibility, credibility, and moral authority for which evangelicals have traditionally taken recourse to claims of objective knowledge. If evangelicals point instead to their behavior as the living truth of their convictions, says Kenneson, "we will be passionately evangelistic, trying to persuade others to our beliefs because if they believe what we believe, they will see what we see; and the facts to which we point in order to support our interpretations will be as obvious to them as they are to us."

BRIAN WALSH AND J. RICHARD MIDDLETON

WITH LYOTARD IN MIND, WALSH AND MIDDLETON MAINTAIN THAT THE BIBLE CONTAINS "COUNTERIDEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS" AND "ANTITOTALIZING FACTORS."

A very different kind of postmodern evangelicalism animates the work of J. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, the co-authors of *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be.* In their hands, the postmodern rejection of claims to objectivity provides a means for a more politically liberal evangelicalism to assert itself against conservative and literalist readings of the Scriptures. Citing Jean-François Lyotard, Middleton and Walsh contend that the postmodern condition spells the death of all forms of explanation that purport to offer a complete, singular, and universal truth. In place of such "totalizing metanarratives," the postmodernist prefers a plurality of stories told from a diversity of viewpoints. This aspect of postmodernism allows evangelicals to reconsider certain biblical passages—particularly those they might regard as

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socially inflammatory, like good-versus-evil battles in the Book of Revelation, or outdated, like commands for wives to submit to their husbands—without rejecting the Gospel. Rather, they can approach Christianity much as a deconstructionist might approach a literary text, dismantling religious narratives in order to locate the voices and values that have, in most tellings, sat quietly on the margins. By reassigning emphasis from themes of violence or intolerance to themes of compassion and social justice, the postmodernist evangelicals claim they can cleanse the Christian story of its past associations with oppression.

Walsh and Middleton concede that "no metanarrative, it appears, is large enough and open enough to include the experiences of all people. Indeed, on a postmodern reading, metanarratives inevitably serve to legitimate the power structures that marginalize or trivialize these experiences." And yet it must be admitted that "the Christian faith is rooted in a metanarrative of cosmic proportions." So what to do? Fortunately, the Bible appears to contain "at least two identifiable, counterideological dimensions or antitotalizing factors.... These dimensions *permit or allow* the Christian story to delegitimate or subvert violent, totalizing uses of the story by those who claim to live by it. The first of these dimensions consists in a *radical sensitivity to suffering* which pervades the biblical narrative from the exodus to the cross. The second consists in the rooting of the story in God's *overarching creational intent* which delegitimates any narrow, partisan use of the story."

In a sense, then, one might say that postmodernism allows evangelicals to have their Scripture and eat it too. When they come across the parts of the Bible most at odds with their political sensibilities, they are relieved of the painful choice of whether to defend, to defy, or to discard them. Rather, they can rearrange the historical and scriptural narratives, bringing certain threads—like that of radical sensitivity to suffering—in from the margins in order to displace other tales, like those of patriarchy and colonial domination.

A final strand of postmodernism that has proven useful to the evangelicals is the insistence that all knowledge is "situated," or embedded in the perspective of its seeker. "The postmodern critique says that all our knowledge comes out of our communities and tradition. It should lead to a renewed acceptance of the Christian community as a center of reflection and action," Kenneson says. In *The Soul of the American University,* George Marsden uses a similar insight to address the spiritual malaise of American secular academia. He contends that if Marxists, feminists, and multiculturalists can claim a place at the seminar table, Christians should also be allowed to add their voices and their subjective takes on reality to the clamor.

THE POSTMODERNIST

evangelicals appear to have reconciled the irreconcilable: keeping the faith while joining the national scholarly conversation, defending the integrity of the Scriptures while emphasizing themes congenial to political liberalism. Ironically, however, these efforts have alienated both their fellow evangelicals and secular postmodernists as well. Both groups grumble

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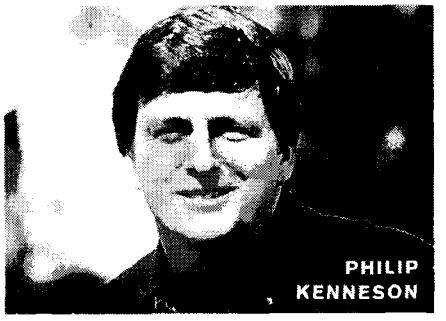
that the evangelical postmodernists show too little fidelity to the sacred texts, whether these be the Scriptures or the writings of twentieth-century French philosophers. And both camps suspect that postmodernism is merely a convenient camouflage for the evangelical professors' political concerns.

Mark C. Taylor, a professor of humanities at Williams College, was among the first scholars to connect postmodernism and religion, during the early 1980s, but he remains largely unimpressed with what he has seen of contemporary postmodernist theology. He notes that there is "widespread confusion about just what postmodernism means," which might explain the deep disjuncture between the exegetical approach of theorists like Walsh and Middleton and the more philosophical concerns that motivate writers like Kenneson. Taylor suspects that many postmodernist theologians have not paid sufficient attention to the seminal texts of postmodernism, such as the writings of Derrida and Lacan. What's more, Taylor faults many religious postmodernists for producing books that are "highly polemical and committed to a variety of ideological positions that obscure the philosophical and theological issues in the debate."


PHILIP KENNESON

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At the same time, fellow evangelicals grumble that the postmodernists so eagerly accommodate secular perspectives that their work often seems indistinguishable from that of plain-old secular postmodernists—or, for that matter, plain-old liberals of any kind. And if people like Kenneson and Walsh can no longer be distinguished from regular liberal Protestants, what do their unorthodox views have to do with the evangelical tradition?

WITH A NOD TO RICHARD RORTY, KENNESON WRITES THAT "CHRISTIANS NEED NOT CONTINUE TO ANSWER THE 'TRUTH QUESTION,' AND THE SOONER WE SEE THAT WE NEEDN'T, THE SOONER WE CAN GET ON WITH THE BUSINESS OF BEING CHRISTIANS."

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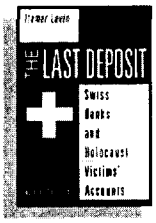

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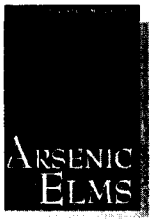

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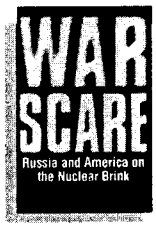

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Indeed, many of the leading postmodern evangelicals no longer attend churches that could be remotely defined as evangelical. Kenneson grew up and studied for the ministry in the Churches of Christ/Christian Church, but he now attends services at the mainline United Methodist Church, to which his mentor, Hauerwas, belongs. Although Walsh works for the Christian Reformed Church, he attends the more liberal Anglican church in Toronto. His collaborator, Middleton, was raised in the Christian and Missionary Alliance and was even a presbyter in that denomination for a while, but he has recently joined the American Baptists. "I moved from a very evangelical denomination to a more mainline denomination with more pluralism," Middleton explains. "The evangelicals are too polemical." Even so, Middleton and Walsh insist they are still evangelical to the core. "My liberal friends think Richard and I are pretty strange," says Walsh.

So, too, do their onetime colleagues in the evangelical world. It doesn't help that *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be* abounds with the stylistic features that normally limit the readership of secular postmodern academic writing to tenure committees: wincingly whimsical chapter titles ("They Don't Tell Stories Like They Used To") and metaphor cocktails ("a wild Dionysian embrace of the flux of anomie"). In one of his reviews, Douglas Wilson lampooned Walsh and Middleton's syntactic flights of fancy. Their prose, he wrote, is "a turgid and purple sort of bureaucratic poetry, flowing across the page like rapidly cooling magma." Meanwhile Jeffrey M. Dudiak, a philosophy professor at King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta, and no slouch at poststructuralist lingo himself, dished out the worst insult there can be for a postmodernist: He called them merely "modern." In a thirty-page single-spaced commentary on the book, Dudiak wrote that Middleton and Walsh's Christian worldview "shares many of the values of what they refer to as modernism: progress (from the garden to the city); optimism; a belief in the value of scientific opening-up...."

Richard Hughes, a religion professor at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, does Dudiak one better in his critique. Of his deconstructionist colleagues he says, "In all that criticism of the

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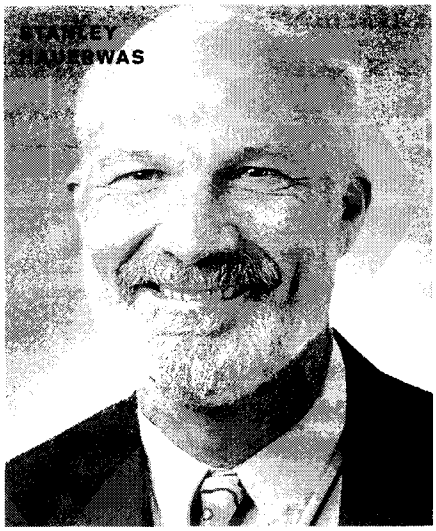

HAUERWAS REGRETS THAT "EVANGELICALS HAVE BOUGHT INTO THE ENLIGHTENMENT PRESUMPTION THAT THE FACTS ARE OUT THERE."

Enlightenment, they come off not so much postmodern as pre-modern."

THE WRANGLING over postmodernism reflects something more than philosophical disagreement. Indeed, it is emblematic of a deeper anxiety that pervades the evangelical academic world. Many evangelicals worry that their postmodernist colleagues are merely capitulating to the crass, commercial, and secularizing pressures of the culture outside their community. And while the postmodernists contend that they are bridging the divide to the younger generation—the editors of *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* state that their book's aim is to reach "a culture that is pluralistic, consumer-oriented, and infatuated with managerial and therapeutic approaches to life"—the traditional evangelicals call it pandering.

John Wilson, editor of *Books and Culture*, an offshoot of the nation's largest and most influential evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, believes that the view of twentieth-century America espoused in books like *Christian Apologetics* is overly simplistic. "But now you've got people making their living as church consultants," he complains, "and they go around and tell pastors, churches, and colleges how to evangelize and keep the next generation in the faith. They tell them that around 1970 the world changed. It's totally ludicrous, but a lot of people are accepting it, and in a lot of settings if you don't accept it you will be cast as someone clinging to 'the modern project.' But there's another group of us who say we don't need postmodernism to rediscover original sin."

John Wilson and Hauerwas believe that evangelicals with social concerns would be better off forgetting postmodernism and exploring age-old modes of Christian thought—the writings of the church fathers, for example—as an antidote to the right-wing, Christian Coalition–style jingoism many of them seem so desperate to avoid. But herein lies the problem: Outside of the Reformed churches, with their legacy from the bookish Calvin, there is not much of an intellectual tradition in conservative Protestantism. "Evangelical colleges have always emphasized manners, what we nowadays call lifestyle, as their defining feature," says James Burtchaell, a Catholic priest and former provost at Notre Dame. Burtchaell is also the author of *The Dying of the Light* (Eerdmans, 1998), a massive and gloomy new study that describes mainline Protestant and Catholic universities' gradual decline into secularization and predicts a similar fate for their evangelical counterparts. "When [mainline universities] began to assimilate as they prospered, they began to assimilate the manners of those around them. So they get carried away by currents," he explains. And indeed, today's evangelical colleges and universities are facing exactly this dilemma.

The mission statements of these institutions proudly affirm a Christian identity, and some require their faculty to sign a statement professing their adherence to specific traditional, sometimes even sectarian, Christian beliefs. However, many of the colleges admit a religiously eclectic mix of students: mainline Protestants as

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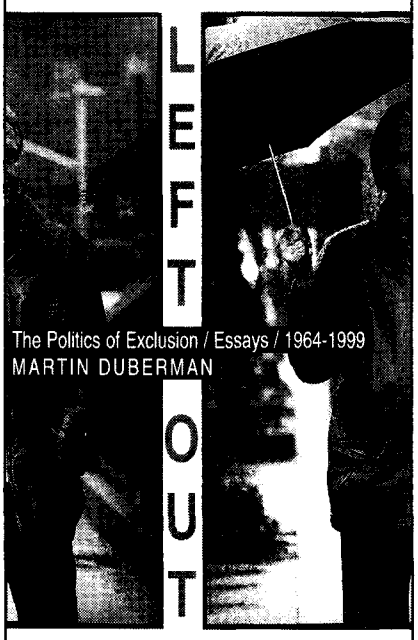

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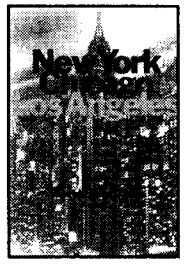

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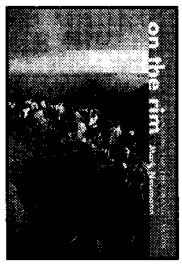

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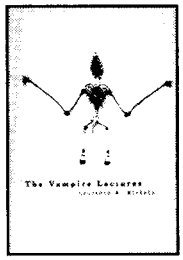

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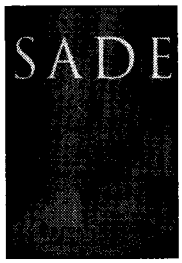

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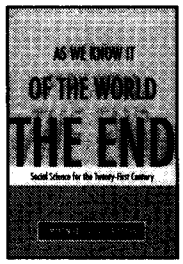

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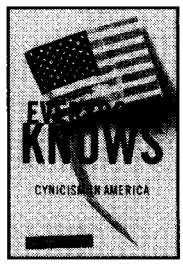

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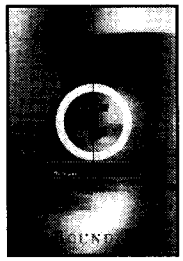

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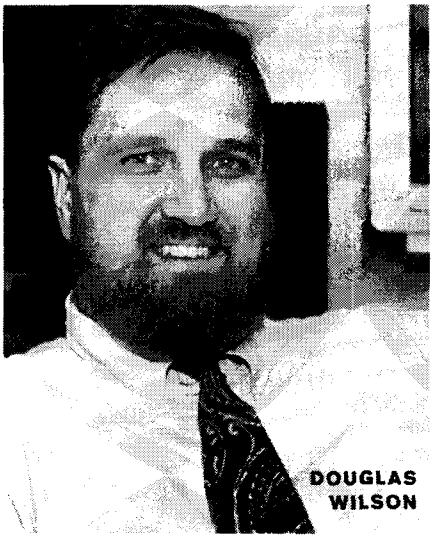
DOUGLAS WILSON LIKENS POSTMODERNIST THEOLOGY TO "A TURGID AND PURPLE SORT OF BUREAUCRATIC POETRY, FLOWING ACROSS THE PAGE LIKE RAPIDLY COOLING MAGMA."

well as evangelicals and even significant numbers of non-Christians. A few have gone so far as to downplay their church affiliations. In 1990, Baylor University in Waco, Texas, rewrote its charter to take itself out from under the control of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, which is affiliated with the Southern Baptists. Pepperdine, one of the nation's most successful Christian colleges, with eight thousand full- and part-time students and a $337 million endowment, does not even belong to the ninety-member Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, the leading association of evangelical schools.



DOUGLAS WILSON

IF POSTMODERNIST monographs have riled up traditional believers, so, too, have other new developments at evangelical colleges.

Take, for example, the case of Andrea Sisam, a junior at Bethel College and Seminary. In 1996, she sued the school for forcing her to view in class chunks of the 1979 German film version of Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum,* which includes a scene of simulated oral sex. Sisam also alleged that she had been forced to watch Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* and read objectionable excerpts from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and that several of her professors had used vulgar language in the classroom. Her suit charged that Bethel had violated a contract to provide her and other students with a Christian education and had broken federal racketeering laws by defrauding her. A judge eventually dismissed the case, but in the meantime, her suit became the subject of wide discussion in the Christian media, including on Pat Robertson's *700 Club* television show.

Richard J. Sherry, Bethel's dean of faculty assessment, insists that the contested books and films served a genuine pedagogic purpose. "We always ask: Are there ethical ways of teaching literature?" Sherry explains. "As you confront a complex and hostile world, you shouldn't just accept its values, but you should be asking how they shaped the culture. Our operative question is: How does this fit in with what we call a Christian worldview?" For that reason, he says, Bethel has offered a seminar on magic realism, and the college theater has produced plays by such avant-gardists as Federico García Lorca, Samuel Beckett, and Eugène Ionesco. Indeed, Bethel deems few literary works too racy for its classrooms. Nonetheless, Sherry says, there are *some* literary works that "you can't deal with when you're eighteen to twenty-two years old. *Lolita*, for example. And we wouldn't teach Cleland's *Fanny Hill*."

Not everyone was mollified by Sherry's remarks. In his one of his attacks on postmodernism, Douglas Wilson took what was probably a dig at Bethel, complaining of "raunchy requirements" at some Christian schools. This provoked a spirited response from Sherry, who defended Bethel and like institutions as "vibrantly Christian." The Bethel dean also accused Wilson of wishing to return to "an age when dead white males studied dead white males."

Wilson seized on this one with glee. "At least at a state school, you know when your faith is being attacked," he says. "At Wheaton and Bethel, what they're being

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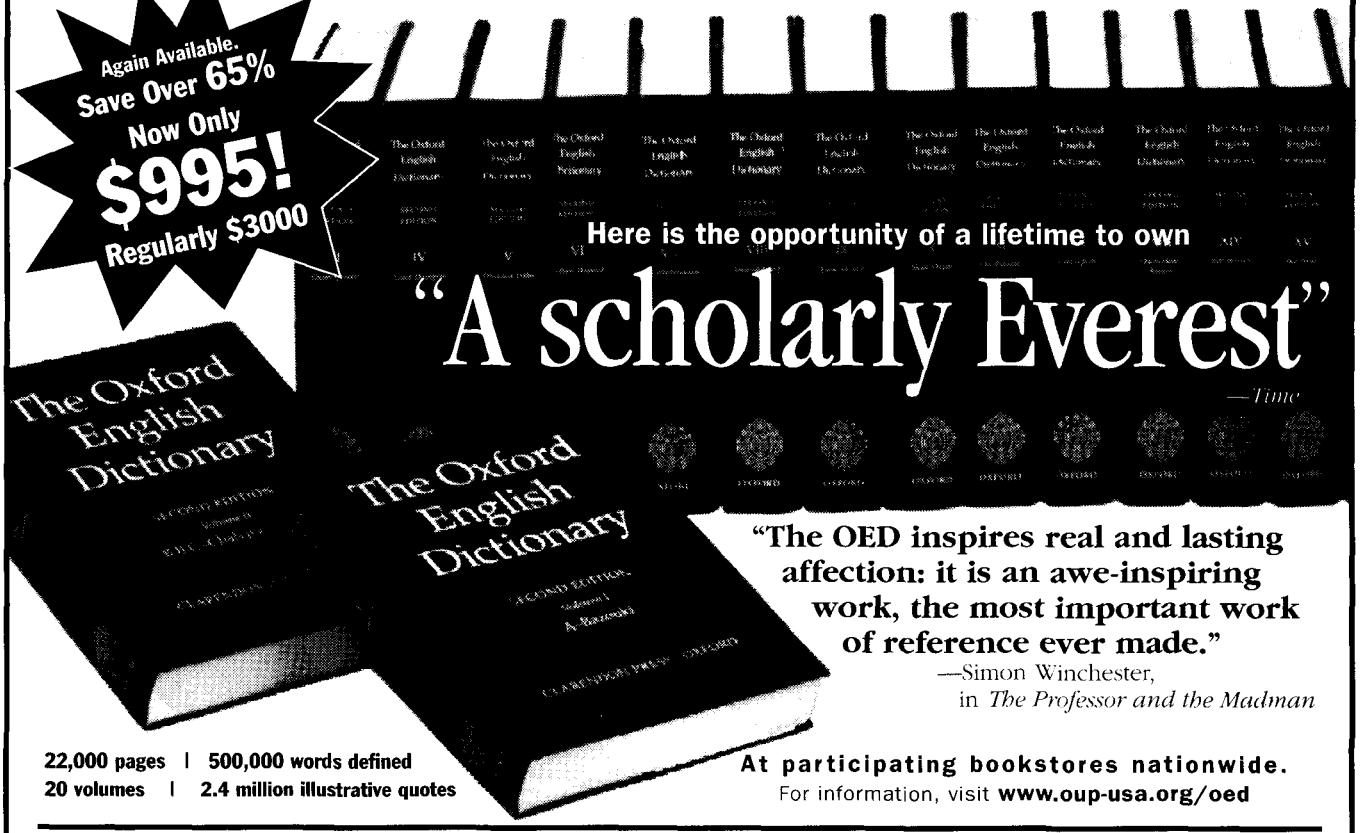

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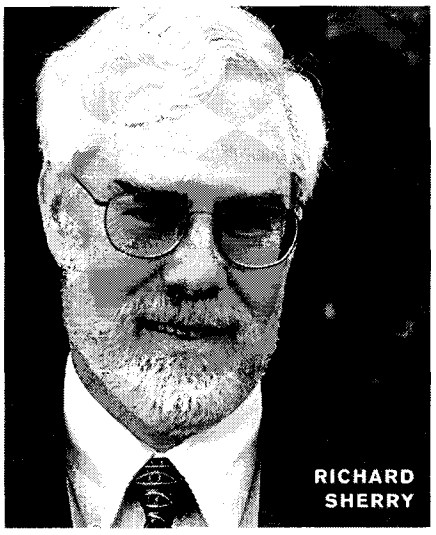

COURTESY OF BETHEL COLLEGE

RICHARD SHERRY'S BETHEL COLLEGE DEEMS FEW LITERARY WORKS TOO RACY AND HAS BEEN SUED FOR SCREENING "THE TIN DRUM" IN CLASS.

taught is anti-faith and anti-intellectual, and they don't even know it."

ARE THE ALARM raisers over postmodernist theology and controversial course requirements—Douglas Wilson, Andrea Sisam, and their allies—fringe fanatics? Or are they onto a disturbing and inexorable trend at those evangelical campuses currently basking in cash and high enrollments? There are some signs that the slope down which those colleges are sliding, or said to be sliding, may not be so slippery after all. One evangelical institution, Azusa Pacific University in California, whose dissipated sense of religious mission Burtchaell had described in detail in *The Dying of the Light*, held a staff and faculty retreat to figure out how to regain what it had lost. Other Protestant colleges have invited Burtchaell to their campuses to help them devise strategies for strengthening their identities.

George Marsden, who does not quite share Burtchaell's dark outlook, thinks there is still a lot of vigor left in the Christian educational establishment he knows so well. "I think there's a strong pull in the direction of secularization" at evangelical colleges, he says. "But there are schools that are doing relatively well. Remember that it took Yale 150 years to secularize. Maybe in another fifty to a hundred years, Calvin and Wheaton will be secularized, but that's a long time."

Or maybe the metanarrative of secularization can be problematized, delegitimated, subverted—or even reversed—once and for all.

Charlotte Allen is a contributing writer to *Lingua Franca* and the author of *The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus* (Free Press). Her article "Brainwashed!" appeared in the December/January 1999 *LF*.

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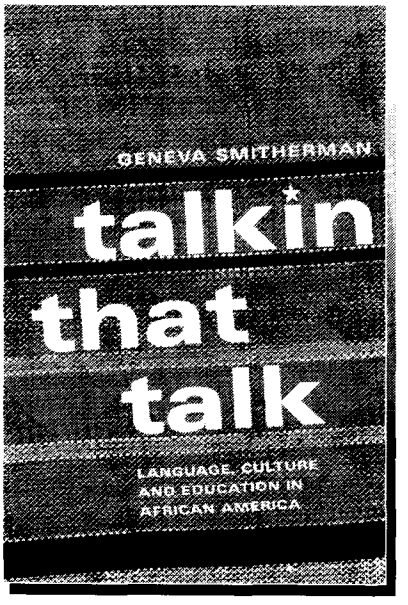

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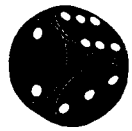

GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

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DANIEL ELLSBERG BEGAN HIS CAREER AS a distinguished scholar of decision theory, but he found his true calling in life as a political maverick and whistle-blower. On June 28, 1971, the forty-year-old MIT economist appeared at the doorstep of the U.S. attorney's office in Boston, having eluded FBI agents over the weekend. An outstanding warrant for his arrest charged him with unauthorized possession of classified documents. Ellsberg, who had spent much of the previous decade working for the Defense Department and the RAND Corporation, had access to the top secret Pentagon Papers, which outlined a deliberate campaign to deceive the public about the escalation of the Vietnam War. Dismayed, he had leaked the information to the press.

"I [released the papers] clearly at my own jeopardy," Ellsberg confessed as he turned himself in to the authorities, "and I am prepared to answer to all the consequences of these decisions." Taking a bold stand against government secrecy was in many ways a drastic departure for Ellsberg, who had served in the Marine Corps before committing himself to military research. On the other hand, unorthodox thinking about risk, decisions, and consequences was nothing new. Although he is best known for leaking the Pentagon Papers, that remarkable act of conscience was actually his second important challenge to the status quo.

Back in the early 1950s, as an undergraduate wunderkind in economics at Harvard, Ellsberg attempted to dismantle the prevailing theory of rational choice. The standard model, introduced for the study of economics by the legendary mathematician John von Neumann and the economist Oskar Morgenstern in their foundational text, *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (1944), sets out to codify the principles that individuals must follow if they wish to best fulfill their goals (or, in the parlance of the theory, if they wish to maximize their expected utility). In his senior thesis, part of which was later published in article form as "Classic and Current Notions of 'Measurable Utility'" (1954), Ellsberg set the stage for a radical critique of the theory's assumptions about what should count as rational.

Unlike the leaking of the Pentagon Papers, this lesser-known revolt played no role in the resignation of the nation's president or the end of its longest war. Yet in the final analysis, given the growing influence of rational choice theory in shaping social thought and policy, who is to say that Ellsberg's earlier, scholarly rebellion won't ultimately be his more important one? In fact, though he has long since abandoned his scholarly goals for a life of political activism (the charges against him were dropped in 1973), his pathbreaking work continues to inspire a group of renegade decision theorists. Dispersed throughout the disciplines of philosophy, political science, economics, and legal theory, these so-called revisionist rationalists are trying to find a place for crucial features of human behavior—things like ethical deliberation, cooperation, and commitment—in the cold world of instrumental calculus.

RATIONAL CHOICE WITH A HUMAN FACE

BY **JAMES RYERSON**

AS THOSE who keep tabs on the social sciences know, the past few decades have witnessed a rise in the popularity of rational choice theory. The economist Kenneth Arrow was the first to extend the rational choice model into the political sphere, arguing in his 1951 book, *Social Choice and Individual Values,* that economic behavior and political behavior could be seen as fundamentally alike. Similarly, in the 1960s, the economist Ronald Coase and the legal scholar Guido Calabresi launched a "law and economics" movement. Ever since, all sorts of social behavior, from marriage and divorce to mental illness, have been examined as sets of decisions made by ideally rational agents. Whenever people compete for a scarce resource—not just money—it's possible to imagine that the conceptual machinery of economics has something to teach us.

Rational choice theory has a reputation for endorsing highly individualist—some might say selfish—behavior. But proponents of the theory hasten to point out that it is not meant to make any presumptions about what people actually covet or should covet; rather, it seeks to explain how people go about best obtaining whatever it is they want. Reason is an instrument, not a philosophy of life.

To its proponents, one of the theory's advantages is that it requires only a few presumptions: (1) In any given decision-making situation, you have a finite set of preferences, each of which can be assigned a relative value and ranked on a single scale; for example, you might prefer to save time on your walk to work while also preferring to not get hit by a passing car. (2) When an opportunity to make a decision arises—to jaywalk or to wait for the traffic light to change—those preferences are weighed together with your belief in the likelihood that a given action will bring about a given result. (3) If you tally up your preferences and your beliefs about probabilities in the right way, you will identify the decision that maximizes the good you expect to obtain; for example, even though you might greatly prefer not getting hit by a car to getting to work on time, you still might rationally decide to jaywalk if you believe the chances of getting hit are minuscule.

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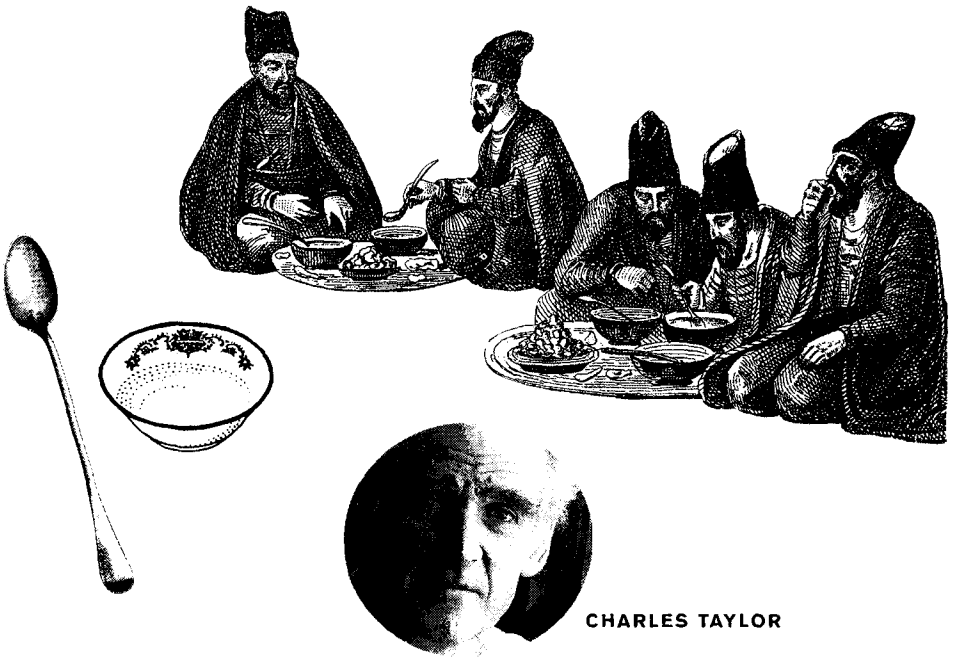
CHARLES TAYLOR OBJECTS THAT IT IS "DEEPLY MISTAKEN" TO "CONSTRUE ALL HUMAN GOALS AS ON THE SAME FOOTING."



CHARLES TAYLOR

To be fully rational, your preferences must conform to a set of fairly intuitive constraints, or axioms, which von Neumann and Morgenstern originally devised and which others, like the economist Leonard Savage, have occasionally modified. The axioms include features like the transitive property: If you prefer *a* to *b,* and *b* to *c,* then you always prefer *a* to *c.* Just as crucially, the orthodox theory works on the assumption that what matters to you are only the *consequences* of decisions. The past is past. All those previous commitments, intentions, promises, and states of mind are never weighed in the calculus, for the model must look relentlessly forward to consider the best possible results of present decisions.

No one actually assumes, of course, that all people act rationally all the time. But rational choice theorists don't expect people to deviate very far from the ideal mark. After all, they reason, most individuals will act irrationally only on anomalous occasions, in moments of confusion or panic. Moreover, such spasms of irrationality are expected to depart from the rationalist's expectations more or less at random and thus effectively cancel each other out.

EVEN ITS detractors concede that the rational choice methodology can be impressive in certain situations. In 1994 the Federal Communications Commission made astonishingly effective use of decision theory models to design and predict the outcome of an auction of airwave licenses. But when the theory ventures outside the closed world of an auction and into the considerably more complicated, and less stylized, arenas of economic, political, and ethical behavior, its critics become wary.

In the 1970s, the psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman claimed that the model was inaccurate in its predictions. In their paper "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Theory Under Risk" (1979), they adduced experimental evidence to contend that real human agents stray from the forecasts of the expected utility model in systematic ways. Likewise, Ellsberg pinpointed empirical problems in his 1961 paper "Risk, Ambiguity, and the Savage Axioms," suggesting that people simply do not think about risk in the way the standard model expects them to.

More broadly, many critics dislike the model's implicit assumption that people are self-centered, calculating machines. The McGill University philosopher Charles Taylor, in his book *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), finds fault with any theory that assumes all human preferences are commensurable: "To reject all qualitative distinctions and to construe all human goals as on the same footing, susceptible therefore of common quantification and calculation according to some common 'currency,'...is deeply mistaken."

Among the model's most debated problems is its failure to account for the benefits of cooperation. Consider, for example, the following morality parable, examined from a rational choice perspective: Five men sit around a circular table, each in front of a bowl of rice, each with one arm tied behind his back, each with the other arm free to make use of a very long spoon. All the men are hungry. But the spoons are too long for any man to be able to feed himself. The solution to this crisis seems obvious: The men coordinate their behavior so that each one feeds the person to his left, and all will eat. The solution is not so obvious, however, if the men are perfect maximizers of their preferences. Why? Because if at the last minute you opt not to participate in this scheme yet the others go through with it, you will eat but will not have to waste your time and energy feeding someone else—the optimal result. Thus, a table full of perfect maximizers will pass up a beneficial course of cooperative action, and none of them will eat.

The cause of this rational choice stalemate is not, as one might initially suspect, pure selfishness. Instead, the problem is that behavior that seeks to maximize anything will preclude cooperation. Take the same parable, for instance, but change the preferences so that each man selflessly desires only that the others eat, and change the silverware so that the spoons are very short and cannot reach to feed one's neighbor. This is an altruist's dilemma. Again, the solution seems obvious: Each man eats for himself, and everyone's preferences are satisfied. When the time comes to execute this plan, however, a perfect maximizer would not honor his obligation to this scheme and would refuse to eat, thus satisfying his altruistic desires without wasting his energy on something he does not value. The dilemma here is exactly the same as in the first case, regardless of

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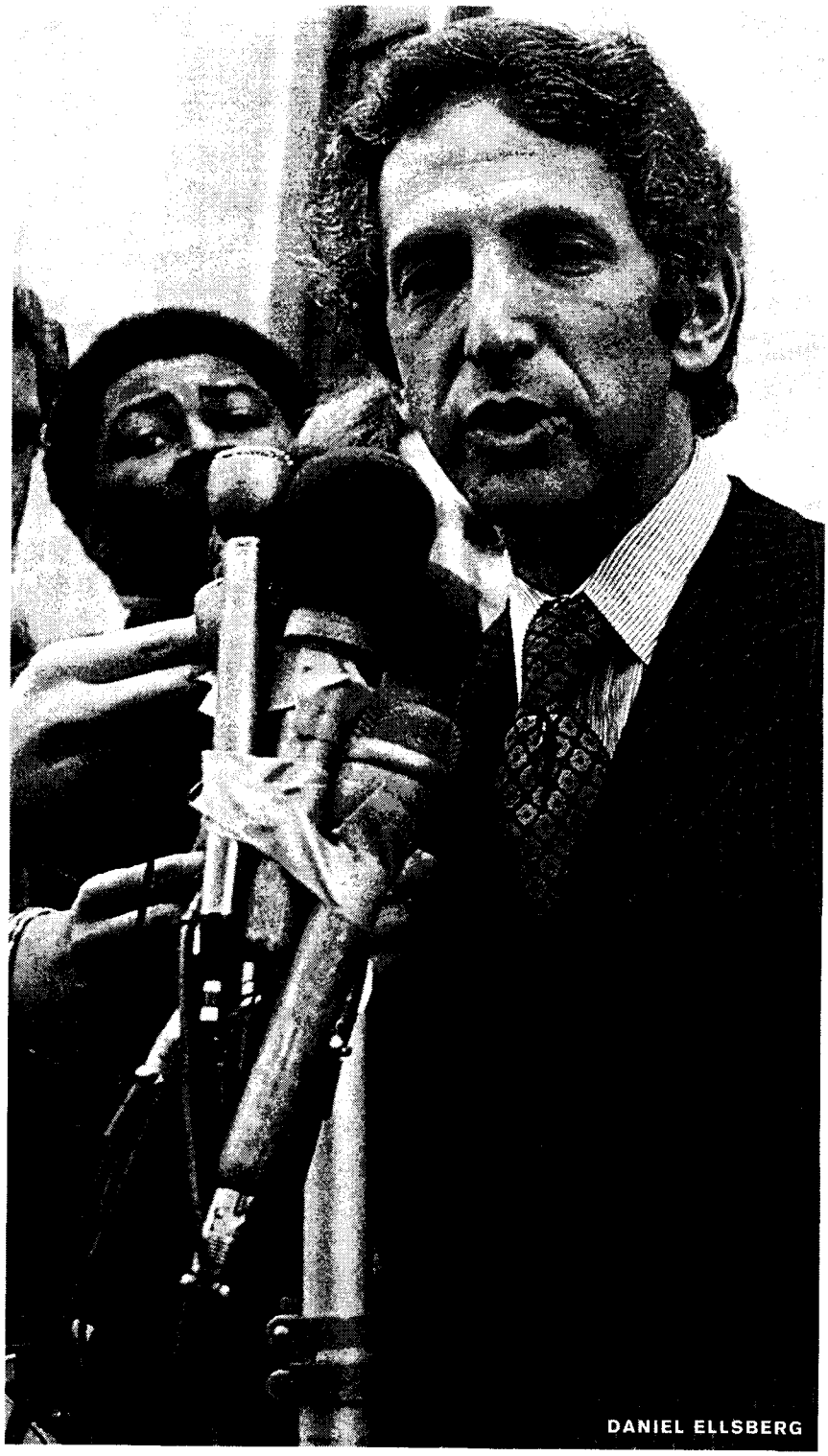
whether one's preferences are charitable or not: If all the men are perfect maximizers, no one gets what he wants.

Some orthodox theorists emphasize that real-world decision making may not require one to reach such unwelcome results. The political scientist Robert Axelrod, for instance, argued in his famous book *The Evolution of Cooperation* (1984) that beneficial cooperation among competitive agents can emerge over time, as they learn the lessons of repeated interaction. The Cornell economist Robert H. Frank claimed in *Passions Within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions* (1988) that cooperative solutions are thankfully ensured by innate emotional behavior, which manages to circumvent the foibles of rationality. One can imagine many similar arguments: People simply have preferences to cooperate; or, people have been unconsciously socialized to do so; or, people have been shaped by the pressures of natural selection to do so. Yet all of these explanations, however ingenious or valuable, still imply a curious result: If we don't employ our best reasoning faculties, we may end up cooperating, and be lucky for it; but if we deliberate rationally, we will be tempted to opt out of any cooperative scheme.

FACED WITH this problem, many critics simply junk rational choice theory altogether. If our models of rationality cannot account for cooperation, well, so much the worse for rationality. The revisionist rationalists, however, take a different tack: By revising the traditional axioms of rational choice theory, they wish to show how cooperation and other social goods can be understood as the products of instrumental decision making.

One of the foremost proponents of such an approach is Bowling Green State University philosopher Edward McClennen, who believes the standard model suffers from a "bias towards conflict." Curiously enough, McClennen followed the reverse of Ellsberg's trajectory: He entered the world of decision theory through the back door of political radicalism and has worked as a committed intellectual nonconformist ever since.

Growing up in Michigan with his childhood friend Robert "Al" Haber, McClennen started out as "a very, very committed radical." At the University of Michigan in the late 1950s, he and Haber,



DANIEL ELLSBERG

ALTHOUGH BEST KNOWN FOR LEAKING THE PENTAGON PAPERS, ELLSBERG'S EFFORTS TO DISMANTLE THE PREVAILING MODEL OF RATIONAL CHOICE MAY HAVE BEEN JUST AS RADICAL.

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IS IT RATIONAL TO QUIT SMOKING? McCLENNEN'S MODEL OF "RESOLUTE CHOICE" WOULD ESTABLISH THAT IT IS.

EDWARD McCLENNEN

together with fellow student Tom Hayden, contributed to the formation of Students for a Democratic Society. But when Hayden delivered the organization's famous Port Huron Statement in 1962, laying out the platform of the student movement, McClennen's commitment hit a snag: "Hayden was saying at some point, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident,' and the philosopher in me balked. I said to myself, 'I don't understand what he's saying; I'm not sure I know what the criterion for self-evidence is.'"

Effectively lost to the student movement at that moment, McClennen returned to his philosophical studies with a newfound passion, allocating a good part of his graduate dissertation to John Rawls's 1958 essay "Justice as Fairness"—probably the first dissertation ever to concentrate extensively on Rawls. In his later work, such as *Rationality and Dynamic Choice: Foundational Explorations* (1990), McClennen has argued that in certain situations it is in our self-interest to curtail self-interested behavior. It may sound paradoxical, but it is sometimes in our interest, he believes, to choose not to pursue the optimal course of action and to pursue cooperation instead. "I have never left the idea which seems to me to have initially animated the student movement," he explains, "that at both the practical and theoretic levels, people have never really developed an account of the power of cooperative activity. That has motivated my work ever since."

Following the core insight of *The Strategy of Conflict* (1960), a seminal text by the Harvard decision theorist Thomas Schelling, McClennen explains that the orthodox model of rationality was originally formulated by examining situations of what's known as perfect competition: zero-sum games like chess, where one player's gain is always another player's loss. Though himself broadly orthodox, and thus ultimately unwilling to alter the traditional model of rationality, Schelling noted that games of pure conflict have an important counterpart: games of perfect coordination such as charades, where one player's gain is another player's gain as well. Situations in which two motorists, heading toward each other, try to avoid a collision or two friends, separated at a rock concert, try to imagine where each would look for the other are characterized by the desire for communication and rendezvous, not secrecy and pursuit. More important than either type of game itself is that the vast majority of real-world situations are mixed: They involve elements of both competition and coordination.

The significance of this insight is particularly evident, McClennen believes, when we look at conflict not between people but within an individual. If we can develop a model that explains how people resolve internal conflicts and coordinate their own behavior, McClennen reasons, then we can use similar principles to understand the role of rational choice in interpersonal dynamics. McClennen starts with the question of how it is that we might rationally choose to follow a rule. After all, when we adopt a rule—say, to quit smoking—we are in effect securing the cooperation of our own future selves. But why should a rational actor do such a thing? By the lights of the standard model, if a rule calls for choosing an action that maximizes one's expected utility, then the rule is good but superfluous. If a rule calls for choosing an action that doesn't maximize expected utility, then it's irrational to obey it. Either way, it makes no sense to be guided by rules; rather, we are guided by the expected consequences of individual decisions.

Scott Shapiro, a revisionist professor at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, notes that one of the most striking places this problem crops up is in the law. "How can you expect people—judges, legal officials, nonlegal officials—to apply rules, to be guided by rules, to evaluate others in light of rules when doing so seems to be an irrational activity?" he asks.

THERE ARE several revisionist accounts of what it might mean for a rational person to choose to be guided by rules. For McClennen, the main problem is that the standard model is thoroughly forward looking. It presupposes an agent

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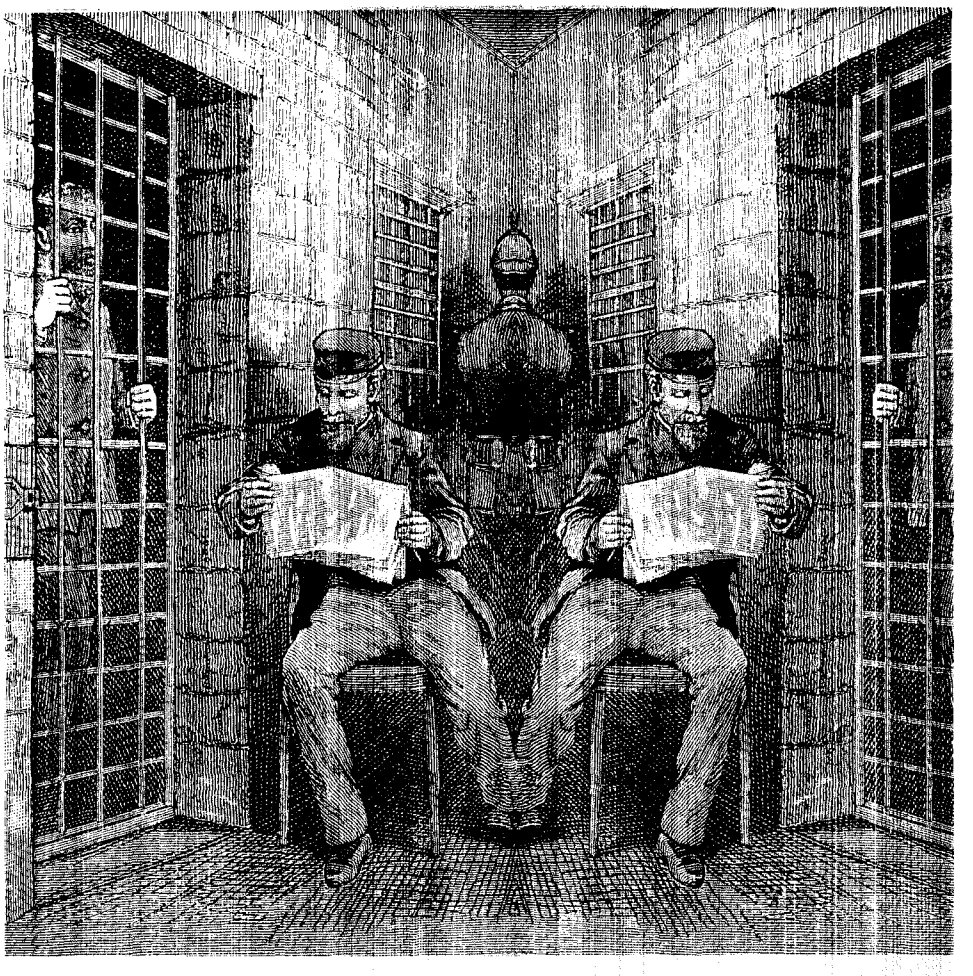
who, at each moment in time, disregards everything that has occurred in the past.

Consider the classic example of a smoker who wants to quit smoking for health reasons and so opts not to smoke her usual morning cigarette. In the future, she will come across cigarettes on many occasions. At each such point, the minimal health damage done by smoking just one more cigarette will be outweighed by the disproportionate pleasure afforded by lighting up, so the rational choice, given her interests in both health and pleasure, is to smoke.

According to the standard model,it would be irrational for our smoker to choose whether or not to smoke a given cigarette by attempting to coordinate her present decision with her earlier decision to quit smoking, since that particular decision is no longer a going concern. McClennen describes this feature of the standard model as the "application of consequentialism in a radically incremental manner." His alternative, a model of decision making he calls "resolute choice," involves a two-tier process of deliberation. First, our smoker considers her long-term goal of personal health, and asks herself what plan of action will do best for this goal, instrumentally, with respect to all her future selves. In this case, adopting a rule not to smoke seems a promising strategy, given the pitfalls of choosing whether to smoke in the future on a case-by-case basis. Crucially, McClennen maintains that the smoker's decision to commit to this rule necessarily entails a preference: namely, the preference to make good on her commitment. Otherwise it would be nonsensical to characterize her decision as a commitment at all.

The second part of McClennen's deliberative process involves a series of specific choices over time: in this case, whether or not to smoke a cigarette at various moments. The smoker's decisions, previously made freely, are now constrained by the additional preference to commit to the plan of action that most effectively promotes her long-term goal. McClennen is thus arguing that if our smoker sets out to follow a rule because it promises to help her accomplish a prioritized goal (namely, improving her health), it's reasonable to assume that she foresees the later sacrifices that the rule will entail. "To conclude otherwise," McClennen wrote in "Pragmatic Rationality and Rules" (1997), "is to suppose that an



SOLVING THE PRISONER'S DILEMMA

The so-called "prisoner's dilemma" is the most well-known problem of rational choice theory. Two prisoners, Ned and Ken, are interrogated separately and informed that they are each in the same predicament. If one of them confesses to his crime and the other remains silent, the confessor will receive full immunity while his accomplice receives a very stiff prison sentence. If both confess, they will both receive moderate sentences. If both remain silent, there will be little evidence against them and they will both receive very light sentences. The situation therefore has four possible outcomes:

1. **Ned confesses and receives immunity, while Ken remains silent and receives a very stiff sentence.**
2. **Both remain silent and both receive very light sentences.**
3. **Both confess and both receive moderate sentences.**
4. **Ken confesses and receives immunity, while Ned remains silent and receives a very stiff sentence.**

Let's assume that each man desires his own immunity over all else, and prefers a very light sentence to a moderate sentence, and a moderate sentence to a very stiff sentence. In this case, both men, as perfectly rational agents, will reason as follows: If the other prisoner remains silent, the optimal decision is to confess, and thereby receive immunity. If, on the other hand, the other prisoner confesses, the optimal decision is also to confess, and thereby avoid a very stiff sentence. In either case, the optimal decision is to confess. Since both men are rational, both choose this optimal alternative, and thus both receive moderate sentences.

And yet the result of this deliberation is curious, for both Ned and Ken end up with an outcome that each ranked as only his third preferred result: a moderate sentence. Had both men acted irrationally, by remaining silent, each would have received his *second* preferred result: a very light sentence.

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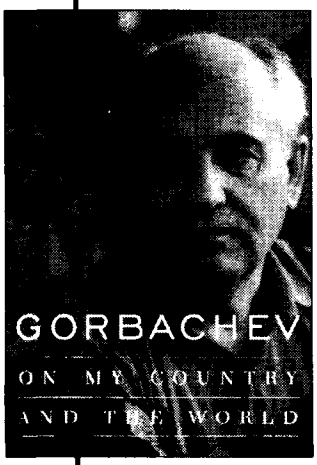

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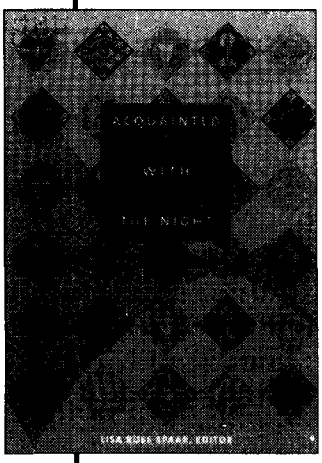

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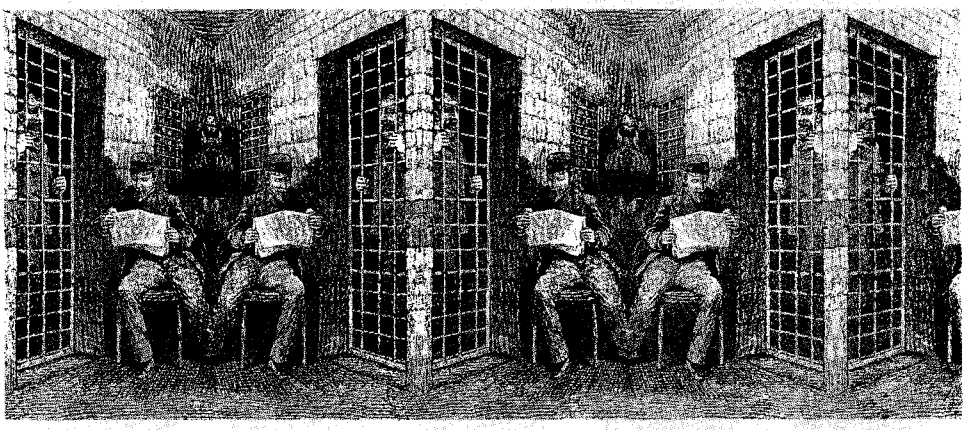
agent is incapable of taking that course of action which is first-best rather than second-best" with respect to long-term goals.

Shapiro too wants to establish the rational credentials of the ex-smoker. A rule, he insists, is effectively the opportunity to make a group of future choices in one fell swoop. As such, a rule cannot be reconsidered at each and every moment it is applied. When Odysseus asked to be bound to the mast of his ship so that he would not be lured by the Sirens' song, he was depriving himself of the option to make a rational decision in the future. Similarly, for our smoker to adopt a rule not to smoke is precisely for her to choose never again to entertain the reasons for and against smoking. If she has the willpower to adhere to this rule, she will never again make a decision about whether or not to smoke; she simply won't smoke.

Shapiro's and McClennen's models might solve the problem of rule-guided behavior, but in doing so they both violate important core assumptions of rational choice. McClennen challenges the presumption that a rational actor will never look backwards or be constrained by past choices. Shapiro, following the work of Columbia University's legendary decision theorist Isaac Levi, violates the axioms in a different way.

According to the standard model, of course, only the consequences of your actions ought to matter to you. And one way you can be assured that you're making decisions based solely on their consequences is this: What you choose over time should be the same as what you would have chosen up front, had you been asked to make your decisions ahead of time. For instance, it shouldn't matter whether you are offered the opportunity, in January, to make a decision about smoking 7,000 cigarettes over the course of the upcoming year, or whether you are actually offered 7,000 cigarettes over the year: The result should be the same in both cases. There should never be, that is, any moments of internal conflict where you acknowledge that in some sense you really wish to smoke a cigarette and yet in another sense you don't.

Shapiro's model aims to allow for the possibility that even perfectly rational agents will experience such conflicts. Shapiro's rational smoker realizes that in some contexts she prefers to smoke more rather



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If rational agents are defined as those who make decisions that do well by their preferences, this conclusion seems paradoxical. Indeed, the prisoner's dilemma is a favorite example for the revisionist rationalists precisely because it captures the peculiarity of rational agents who, by virtue of an inability to constrain their self-interest, fail to obtain the very real benefits of cooperation.

According to University of Pittsburgh philosopher David Gauthier, author of the landmark revisionist text *Morals by Agreement* (1986), the prisoner's dilemma points to an important conclusion: Any solution to the prisoner's dilemma requires each prisoner to constrain his self-interest, allowing him to do well for himself by cooperating. Therefore, if we understand morality as a check on self-interest, it can actually be justified in the very terms of self-interest, for moral constraint often creates beneficial opportunities that would otherwise not exist. At the heart of Gauthier's program, as well as those of the other revisionists, is an attempt to weave into rational choice theory a venerable strand of liberal thought: the notion that moral agents of a certain sort genuinely do better for themselves. Contrary to Kant, morality does not have to hurt.

And yet, there remains something intuitively odd about Gauthier's approach. When push comes to shove, and it comes time to make a decision, defecting from an already existing cooperative scheme may well yield a better result for the individual than cooperating. So we seem to reach an impasse. The person who follows the standard model of rationality may do poorly for himself by failing to agree to cooperative schemes, and therefore failing to reap the benefits of arrangements that are only possible through cooperation. On the other hand, the revisionist actor may do poorly for himself by failing to take full advantage of the freeloading opportunities that an in-place cooperative scheme will provide.

Gauthier hopes to overcome this potential weakness by arguing that rationally bargaining agents, given certain starting conditions, can succeed in "internalizing moral principles." Consider a group of individuals who share an interest in mutual benefit—that is, a group that collectively understands the disadvantages of improving one's own situation to the detriment of another's. Gauthier believes the members of this group can rationally choose to cooperate with others, as long as those others share the same disposition toward mutual benefit. When dealing with fellow "conditional cooperators," they will cooperate; when dealing with less trustworthy characters, they will not allow themselves to be taken advantage of.

But can morality and rationality be reconciled so neatly? The economist Ken Binmore, for one, remains highly skeptical of such claims: "Gauthier analyzes another game, which isn't the prisoner's dilemma, and discovers that cooperation is rational in this other game. Which it is. But it's not the prisoner's dilemma."—**J.R.**

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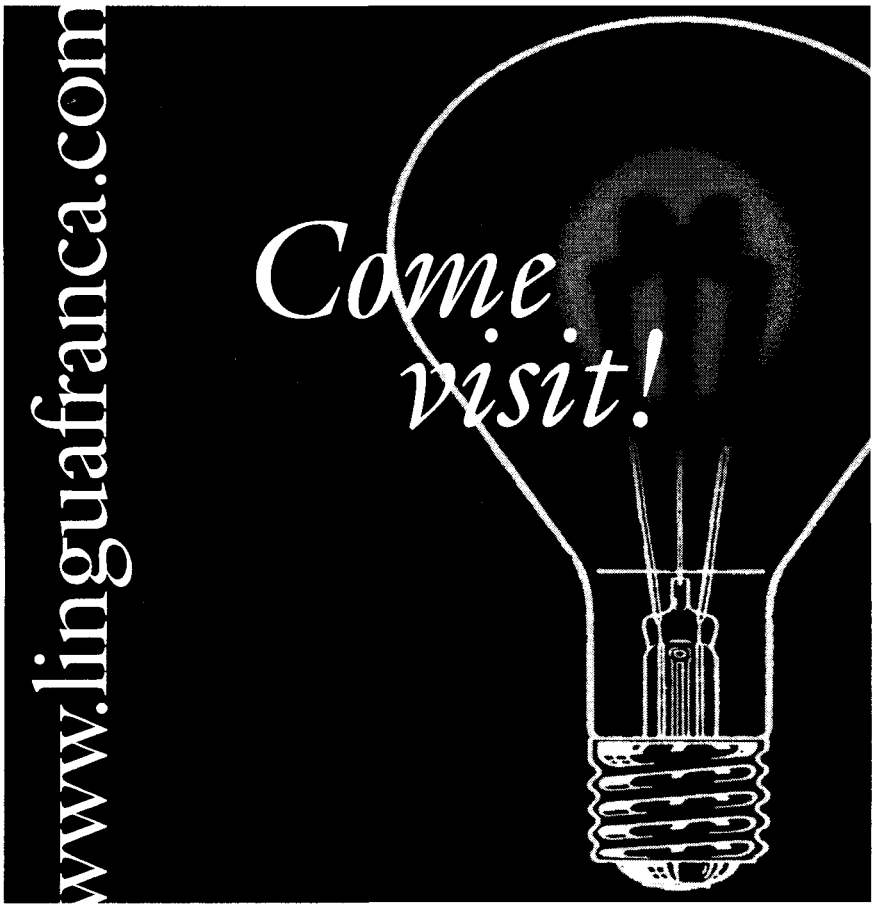

than less (when she has to make decisions from moment to moment) but in other contexts she prefers to choose to quit smoking altogether (when she is offered the choice to make all possible future decisions to smoke up front—that is, when she considers adopting a rule).

Shapiro acknowledges that once a smoker has adopted a rule that best serves a long-term goal, she will still face moments when the best outcome for her short-term preferences will nonetheless be to smoke. But he believes it's perfectly rational to override those preferences: One can simply refuse to consider certain actions as feasible alternatives, even if those actions would seem to advance the smoker's expected utility at a given moment. McClennen's approach is different. He does not believe that a rule follower need throw any preferences out of court. Rather, he argues that anyone who has made a commitment to an instrumentally chosen rule has a preference to honor it. That's just what a commitment is, he argues. The preference to follow the rule will act to constrain any future preference to violate the rule and will, indeed, often outweigh it.

THE REVISIONISTS conclude that they have arrived at an important truth: Sometimes our most cherished goals have to be pursued indirectly, patiently, and with self-constraint.

More mainstream rational choice theorists like Ken Binmore, on the other hand, believe that the revisionists are stabbing at phantoms of their own imagining. Binmore, who teaches economics at London's Centre for Economic Learning and Social Evolution, is the author of two volumes on decision and game theory that address these issues, *Playing Fair* (1994) and *Just Playing* (1998). The revisionists' efforts, he believes, betray simple confusions that are endemic to their background. "Most philosophers don't even know what expected utility theory is; they don't know any mathematics, and they can't read anything with mathematical equations in it. So they make mistakes."

For Binmore and others, the standard model of rationality is too elegant in its simplicity and value-neutrality to be easily relinquished. Consequently, if people deviate from the standard model, they simply ought to have behaved differently, for they literally have no rational justifi-

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"IF WHAT'S RATIONAL CONFLICTS WITH YOUR GUT FEELINGS, THEN TOO BAD FOR YOUR GUT FEELINGS," SAYS BINMORE.

cation for their actions. He puts the case for the standard model succinctly: "What happens is people see behavior that is irrational from our point of view, and they want to change the theory of decision making. That's like seeing someone doing arithmetic badly and saying, 'Well, I'm going to change the laws of arithmetic.' That wouldn't make any sense.... If what's rational conflicts with your gut feelings, then too bad for your gut feelings. I was a mathematician once, and I often had very strong gut feelings, and they were often wrong. Same thing here."

The problem with Binmore's case, however, is the nagging implication of mass irrationality. If people sometimes act irrationally, that's one thing; the occasional aberration is not enough to skew a large-scale sampling. But if people act irrationally all the time, perhaps there is some method to their madness. Perhaps, that is, they are acting rationally but in ways that our traditional models of rationality fail to capture. "It's not just that people, as it were, add wrong," stresses Shapiro, "it's as if they always add wrong. If you saw everyone adding two and two and getting five, then you wouldn't presume they made a mistake; you would say that maybe 'two' doesn't mean two or 'plus' doesn't mean plus."

In his 1953 essay "The Methodology of Positive Economics," the legendary economist Milton Friedman argued that an economist's picture of rationality could be as strange and unintuitive as he wished it to be, so long as the theory demonstrated predictive or explanatory power. Fair enough, but when critics like Ellsberg raised questions about the model's predictions, mainstream economists stuck to their guns. Such conservatism seemed itself counterintuitive: If people demonstrate "consistent aberration"—an oxymoron, by most accounts—does it not seem logical to alter our notion of what qualifies as aberrant and what qualifies as rational?

ONE MIGHT expect John Broome, a professor at the University of Saint Andrews, to have something charitable to say about the combatants on both sides of the standoff, for he edits *Economics and Philosophy*, a journal dedicated to communication between the two disciplines. In his view, however, "the two disciplines do not in fact communicate." He adds: "The truth is that philosophers tend to be not much good at things that matter to economists and economists tend to be not much good at things that matter to philosophers." Broome's book-review editor at *Economics and Philosophy*, Christopher Morris, a philosopher and colleague of McClennen's at Bowling Green State, is more inclined toward the revisionists: "The revisionist project is quite hot, but it's still soundly a minority interest. It's simply mind-boggling that economists, who govern the issue of rationality, aren't worried about why they can't explain rules and norms."

A different sort of skepticism than Broome's, and one that cuts even deeper, is voiced by University of British Columbia philosopher Peter Danielson, the author of *Artificial Morality: Virtuous Robots for Virtual Games* (1992). Danielson has veered away from axiomatic approaches to these questions altogether, choosing instead to employ computer simulations. Danielson creates computer models in which artificial agents try out various strategies of competitiveness and cooperation that may or may not yield the best individual result. Broadly speaking, he considers himself part of the instrumental school, because he's interested in whether it's possible to justify the constraint of choice on instrumental grounds: "The bottom line is that in some important sense it pays to be righteous or right or good."

But Danielson now avoids saying that what he studies is a branch of rational choice theory. "A lot of ink has been spilled over who's got rationality right," he laments. "I think that what's going to fall out of my approach is that we're going to know when the standard model of rationality works well and when it doesn't. Looking at artificial agents who succeed will help us understand what works, what solves various problems of social inter-

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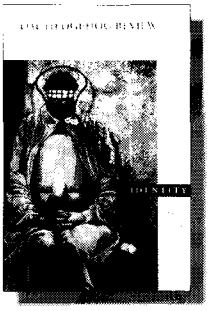

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WHEN PEOPLE DISPLAY "CONSISTENT ABERRATION," IT WOULD SEEM NECESSARY TO CHANGE OUR NOTION OF THE ABERRANT.

action. But we're not going to be stuck saying, 'Is that method rational?'" In Danielson's view, the glaring problem is that each side in the revisionist-orthodox debate takes a set of definitions as given, and then merely "bounces the ball back and forth."

Danielson may be right to suggest that what we have here is a deadlock of definitions, with each side observing a different kind of behavior, producing models that account for it, and then bickering over who gets to call its model rational. But even if his artificial agents could get decision making down to a science, there would still be a further burden for the rest of us. We may ultimately be able to generate a virtual agent that manages to do extremely well for itself in all manner of social situations. But does this agent act in ways that we would want to describe as reason based? Is this conduct interpretable or recognizable as human agency? The salient idea here is that an individual who acts without reason is one who fails to do what he thinks will bring him closer to his goals. Like a disobedient child who cannot formulate a coherent explanation for his misdeeds, such a person does things "just because." Is this how we want to explain the phenomenon of voluntary cooperative behavior?

"Behavior is not just the movement of your limbs and the flapping of your jaws," Shapiro contends. "If you can't see people who are acting on rules as acting on reasons, then you can't understand their behavior as agency. If you give up on rules, then you give up on the law, schools, clubs, every institution. You'd have to say that there's an enormous amount of behavior out there that's not describable as agency, and that's crazy."

CERTAINLY, it would be hard to understand Ellsberg's behavior on June 28, 1971, as rational. The rebellious decision theorist had no interest, of course, in going to jail and no belief that his courageous action would, on its own, lead to the end of the war in Vietnam. Rather, his choice was based on the notion that if all others in his situation were to reveal the pernicious secrets and lies of official cover-ups, we would all be in a position to reap the collective benefits of an honest government.

As an individual agent, he constrained his immediate self-interest; but as one who stood to benefit from a cooperative enterprise, he also enjoyed, at least in theory, the possibility of doing well. "From the decision-making point of view, yes, I was the man who had the documents and I was the man who decided to reveal them," he explained in an October 5, 1971, interview in *Look* magazine. "In my case, the content of the statement was more important than the act, but I would be glad if the act itself was an example to others.... The odds [however] are in favor of my spending a long time in prison."

James Ryerson is an editor at *Feed*, an on-line magazine. His monograph, *Whetting the Edge: The Educational Jurisprudence of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*, was recently published by the Wayland Press.

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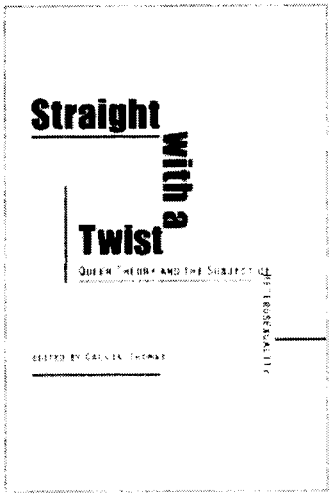

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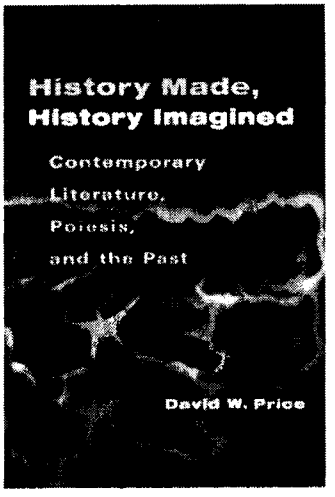

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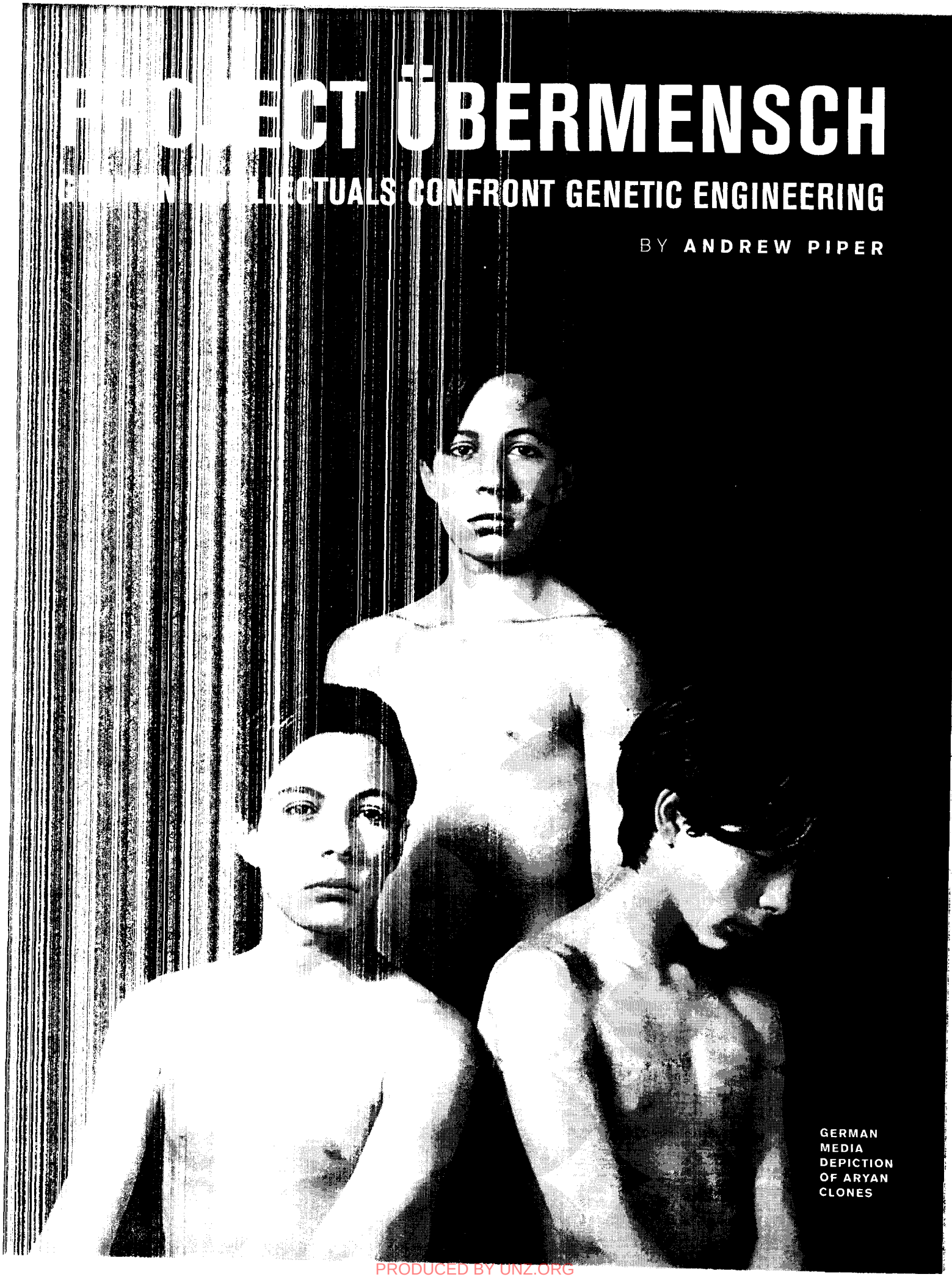
PROJECT ÜBERMENSCH

GERMAN INTELLECTUALS CONFRONT GENETIC ENGINEERING

BY ANDREW PIPER



GERMAN MEDIA DEPICTION OF ARYAN CLONES

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"THE PHILOSOPHER PETER SLOTERDIJK calls for a genetically engineered revision of mankind." This was the less than delicate headline that opened this fall's intellectual debate in Germany. Of course, when a prominent German thinker starts talking about "selection," "breeding," and "biotechnological optimization," everybody starts listening.

Sloterdijk, the author of the wildly popular *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983), which sold more than forty thousand copies in its first few months, is known as a provocative, original, and independent cultural critic. And "Rules for the Human Zoo: An Answer to the Letter on Humanism," the talk he delivered last July at the Elmau Castle in Bavaria, was deliberate in its attempt to provoke. At first, it received little public notice. But in September, both *Die Zeit* and *Der Spiegel* curiously ran pieces about it in the same week. By the end of the month, the Sloterdijk affair was in full bloom: More than one hundred articles had been written on it.

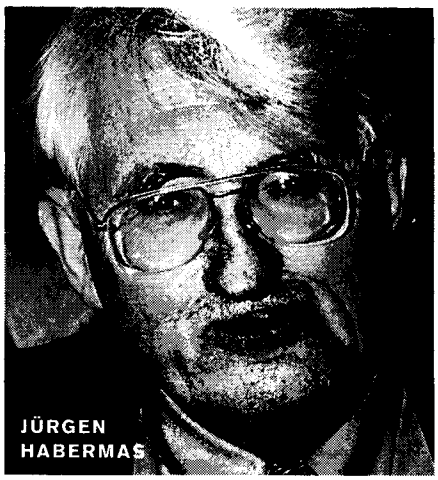
Public statements were issued, frightening images of Aryan clones were published in *Die Zeit*, the revered philosopher Jürgen Habermas was accused of subterfuge—and all of this culminated in a *Spiegel* cover story titled "GEN-Projekt Übermensch [The superman gene project]." As the extended controversies surrounding the Australian philosopher Peter Singer have exhibited, the field of bioethics—and the attendant questions of life, death, and selection—can be touchy. Nowhere is this more acute than in Germany, where many recall the Nazi project to breed a superrace. But Sloterdijk's talk and the ensuing outcry revealed that this debate was not only about the anguish of what Sloterdijk called the "coming era of species-political decisions." It was also a sign of a generational sea change in German intellectual life.

SLOTERDIJK'S Elmau talk, as it's colloquially called, was delivered at an intimate conference that was sponsored in part by Jerusalem's Hebrew University. To a small audience of Christian and Jewish theologians and philosophers assembled to discuss the lofty topic of "exodus from being," he posed a blunt question: Was the age-old humanist ideal of educating humankind ever all that different from the more recent notion of genetically engineering or breeding humankind? Traditionally understood, the humanist project extols the powers of reason, freedom, and education to shape individuals and societies. A literate public forms an enlightened, moral community. Or so German exponents of *Kultur*, from Kant and Humboldt to their late-twentieth-century descendant Habermas, have maintained.

But, of course, the humanist project has had its foes. The "letter on humanism" in Sloterdijk's title refers specifically to a 1947 essay by the philosopher Martin Heidegger, which began as a letter to a friend. In it, Heidegger expresses deep skepticism about the future of a European humanist intellectual tradition in the wake of the brutalities of World War II. The existence of highly literate publics had clearly done little to avert catastrophe. Indeed, Heidegger's own erudition did not stop him from supporting the Nazi Party. In response to the stark lessons of recent history, Heidegger wished to replace the humanist subject—man as a rational agent—with a broader and more ethereal category of "being."

Sloterdijk's approach is decidedly less abstract. In contrast to both Heidegger and traditional humanists, he emphasized the close relationship between humanist ideals and biological facts. The advance of reason is not an emancipation from the body but a certain way of conditioning the body. Seen in this light, humanist education and genetic engineering—the selection or creation of genes that will fashion people who are more healthy, more intelligent, more attractive, perhaps even more ethical—are closely related: Both are deliberate efforts to improve the nature of the human species. "Reading and selection [Lektionen und Selektionen] have more to do with each other," writes Sloterdijk, "than any cultural historian is willing or able to imagine." Or, as he stated flatly in an interview with *Focus Magazine*, "You have to understand, finally, that humans have always been 'made.'" Citing marriage, class, and education as forms of selection, he concluded: "And now, in addition, biotechnological optimization appears."

The most controversial aspect of Sloterdijk's lecture, however, was not his contention that genetic engineering is compatible with humanism. Rather, it was his assertion that the traditional instruments of education have become thoroughly obsolete, rendering genetic engineering the *only* viable form that human progress can take today. In making this case, Sloterdijk offered an unusual combination of 1990s-style technological optimism and 1900-style Wilhelmine pessimism. Biotechnology may make genetic engineering possible; but it is other technologies, and specifically communications technologies, that make it *necessary*. With the consecutive rise of radio, television, and the Internet, cultural communities are no longer determined by reading, humanism's principal tool in social engineering. The result is not only illiteracy but "today's tendency toward barbarism." (In his talk, Sloterdijk offered only one example of such barbarism: school violence in the United States.)


JÜRGEN HABERMAS

Nowhere did Sloterdijk directly call for a genetic revision of humankind, as his critics alleged. Nor was he especially concrete about what kinds of biotechnology he had in mind. But he did provocatively ask: "What will domesticate man when humanism fails as a school of domestication?" At the very least, the philosopher seemed to suggest that genetic technology had inherited the humanist project. Moreover, if biotechnology means accepting the division of human beings into the genetic engineers and the genetically engineered, the zookeepers and the animals in the "human zoo," well, so be it: Humanism has always assumed the superiority of the cultured to the uncultured, of the breeders to the bred.

THE "SCARY REALISM," as *Die Zeit* put it, of Sloterdijk's talk prompted the usual pageant of articles and opinions by respected molecular biologists

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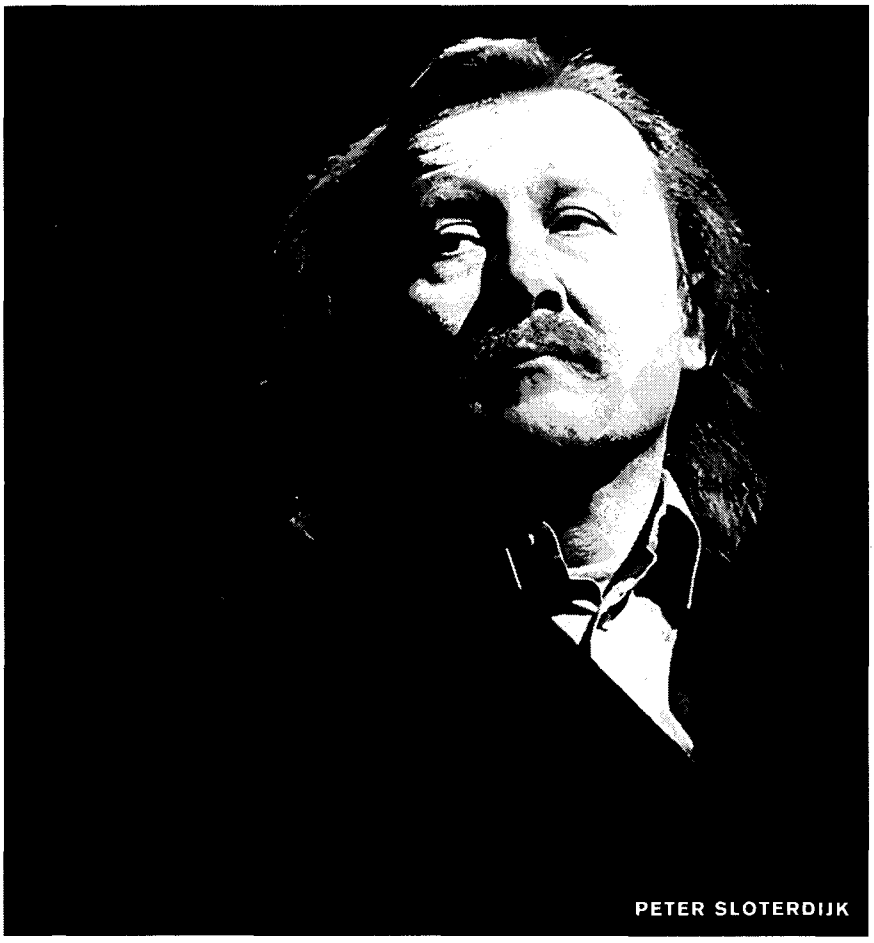
and legal scholars on why we find the topic of genetic engineering so eldritch. Thomas Assheuer, the writer for *Die Zeit* whose article launched the debate, suggested that questions of genetic engineering and bioethics violate the age-old taboo against defining "life." As another critic put it, "Where there is a clone, there can no longer be an 'I.'" Others worried about the power of a small minority to control the fate of other people's genes. Who, as Sloterdijk himself asked, gets to write the "codex of anthropotechnologies"? Genetic engineering is not an extension of the humanist program, so the argument goes, but its end. What becomes of human self-determination when we, or a small number of us, alter the very nature of the human?

In response to these concerns, Lee Silver, a molecular biologist at Princeton University, reminded German readers in an interview of the important distinction between eugenics (state run) and reprogenetics (guided by individual choice), the latter deemed to be less frightening and in keeping with notions of freedom. In a similar spirit, the legal theorist Ronald Dworkin suggested, in an article for the British magazine *Prospect* that was reprinted in *Die Zeit*, that what we are most afraid of in discussions of biotechnology is the possibility of a "moral free fall." Once we begin to alter our biological composition, to "play God" in Dworkin's words, we lose the stability of our moral order. How will we know when we have crossed ethical boundaries? And yet, Dworkin argued, in a complex society, this is a necessary stage of moral evolution.

Dworkin's assertion that debate about biotechnology is healthy and necessary will not strike most Americans as controversial. But in a country like Germany, for historical reasons, it is difficult for this discussion to take place. To so much as raise questions concerning selection and breeding can immediately imply frightening conclusions. Consider the headline in *Der Spiegel:* SLOTERDIJK'S LATEST TALK ON "HUMAN BREEDING" BEARS ELEMENTS OF FASCISTIC RHETORIC. There were few articles that did not implicitly ask the question, "Why did he have to use the word 'selection'?" Ideology and the past understandably combine to stay public discussion. More modest calls, like that of Jens Reich, the director of the Max-Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine in Berlin, for a "de-tabooing" of the subject, are easily passed over. It was not surprising that the immediate coverage of Sloterdijk's talk invoked the image of the horrified Jewish listener: "The ill feeling of the symposium's Jewish participants was still written on their faces the next day."



PETER SLOTERDIJK

LASHING OUT AT HABERMAS AND HIS ALLIES, SLOTERDIJK DECLARED THAT "CRITICAL THEORY DIED ON SEPTEMBER 2."

AS THE GERMAN press trotted out well-worn images of human clone farms or mice with human ears growing out of their backs, one couldn't help thinking that other issues were at stake. Consider the rhetorical venom of Sloterdijk's responses. After the original pieces in *Die Zeit* and *Der Spiegel,* he published two public letters (a revered tradition in German intellectual circles), one to Assheuer and one to Habermas, the papa of contemporary German philosophy. Assheuer was accused of foisting "biological gothic" and "sociological pulp romanticism" onto the public and was held up as a case study of how the venerable tradition of *Kritik,* or the rigorously impartial elaboration of concepts, had turned into publicity to be sold on the markets of attention. And with the letter to Habermas, who had not even spoken out on the matter, things only got more polemical.

Sloterdijk accused Habermas of covertly procuring a copy of his talk (he had forbidden its dissemination beyond conference attendees) and then shopping it around to editor "friends" with a note attached flagging the dangerous thoughts. Although this sounds a bit paranoid, it may explain why a talk delivered in July did not catch the serious attention of the

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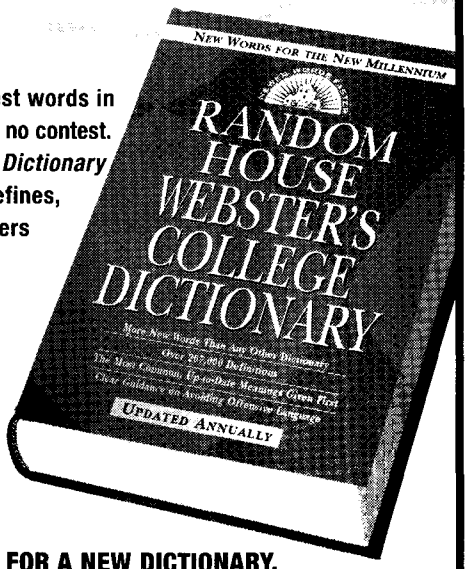

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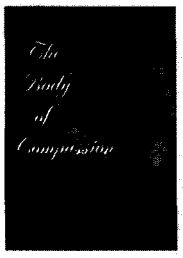

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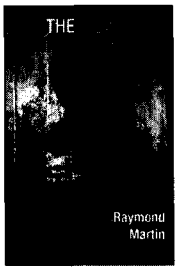

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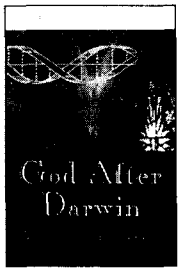

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press until September and why *Der Spiegel* and *Die Zeit* ran pieces in the same week. Habermas, in a letter to the editor of *Die Zeit,* denied the charges as "an amusing ghost story." Whether or not they are true, Sloterdijk's allegations serve up a rich irony: Habermas, whose philosophy rests on an appeal for a transparent public sphere of communication, stands accused of back-room maneuvering. "You have spoken, Herr Habermas, with an enormous number of people about me but never with me," Sloterdijk wrote. He called this a form of "media Jacobinism" where denunciation equals liquidation. He was tired, he said, of Habermas's "era of hypermoral sons of the National Socialist fathers." And then, referring dramatically to the date that Assheuer's article appeard in *Die Zeit,* Sloterdijk wrote, "Critical theory died on September 2."

As Antje Vollmer pointed out in the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* the spat between Habermas and Sloterdijk was a clear sign of a generational shift in German intellectual circles from the moral stringency (or, if you like, political correctness) of Günter Grass and Habermas to the self-styled dangerous thinking of writers like Peter Handke, Botho Strauss, and Sloterdijk. Dangerous thinking, in this context, can refer variously to Sloterdijk's deployment of the word "selection" in front of an audience of Jewish theologians or to Handke's production of a pro-Serb play during the Kosovo crisis.

Like all intellectual turns, this one has a history: It dates back to the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, in which historians debated whether the Holocaust was really all that unique compared with other programs of mass murder; and it encompasses a 1993 essay by Strauss criticizing the German "guardians of conscience"; the ten-year debate over whether to build the Berlin Holocaust memorial; and Martin Walser's 1998 talk petitioning for an end to "the instrumentalization of our shame." In each case, a new intellectual position is tied to an overcoming of German memory. And in each case, it was Habermas who most stringently rejected any impulse to look forward that might seem to justify or excuse the horrors of the past. Perhaps this is why, in his public letter, Sloterdijk ignored questions of genetic engineering and announced the end of critical theory and the tiredness of

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Habermas's hypermorality. This is why the debate became so personal so quickly.

For a sociologist sympathetic to Habermas, Reinhard Mohr, the debate also involved the politics of publishing. In *Der Spiegel,* Mohr noted that Suhrkamp Press, formerly the "flagship of left intellectuals" and still home to Habermas, is now also the publishing arm of Sloterdijk et al. These days, Mohr lamented, "Social criticism is replaced by genetics, and the uterus replaces social utopia." It's an arresting image. But what seems more important today is that, like Suhrkamp's schizophrenic publishing program, the positions of German intellectuals and politicians are getting harder to map: Günter Grass, Nobel laureate and former confidant of the left-wing chancellor Willy Brandt, publicly excoriates Oskar Lafontaine, an icon of the old left, at the Frankfurt Book Fair; Joschka Fischer, a former pacifist, sends German troops into battle for the first time since World War II; and Sloterdijk couples media criticism with bioethics, fantasizing a post-human humanism.

If Germany's intellectual scene seems to have lost its compass, perhaps this reflects the deeper disorientation of a society still in transition. In his response to Sloterdijk's public letters, Assheuer called his piece "What Is German?" and concluded: "Sloterdijk practices a form of cultural criticism loaded with aggressive ressentiment against the social welfare state and mass culture." The title gives away what the debate was in part about all along: the troubled beginnings of a new Berlin republic. Whether Sloterdijk's writing exhibits "ressentiment" or just old-fashioned *Kritik* is a good question, but his work is certainly a challenge to the positions and cultural criticism of the old, respectable, and, yes, provincial Bonn republic. This is what makes the Berlin republic a much more interesting place, for better and worse. And, if nothing else, the debate surrounding his Elmau talk demonstrates that Sloterdijk, like the bioethicist Peter Singer, is asking questions that we are simply not prepared to answer, even if they have always been there. Or, as Sloterdijk concluded in his speech: "Our life is just the muddled answer to questions we no longer remember having asked."

Andrew Piper is assistant editor of the *Germanic Review*, a journal of German literature, culture, and thought.

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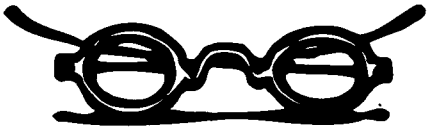

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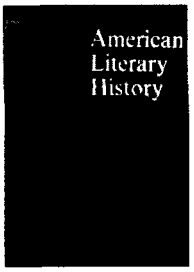

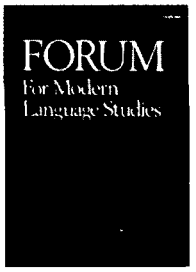

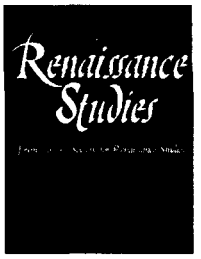

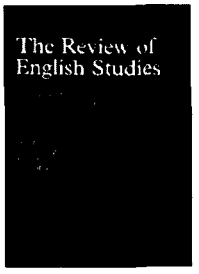

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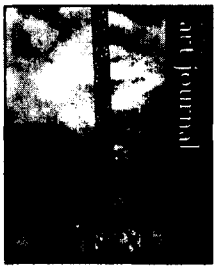

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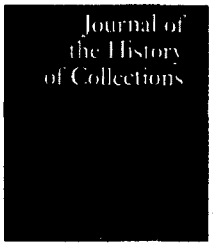

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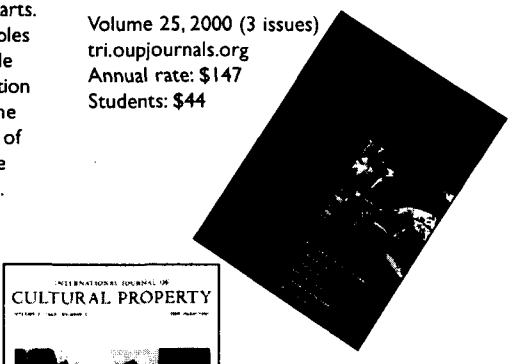

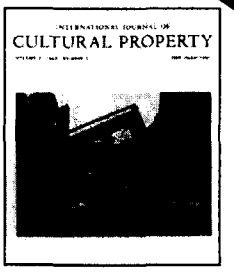

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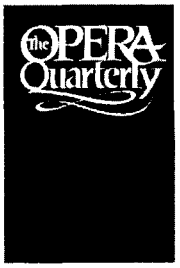

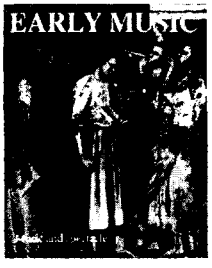

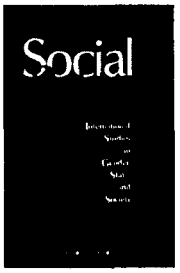

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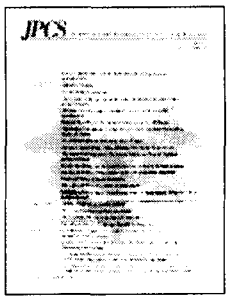

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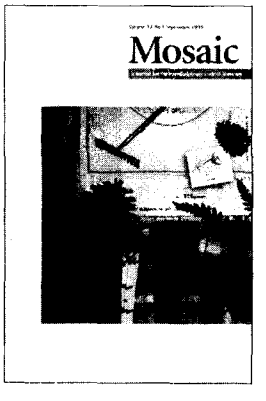

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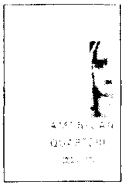

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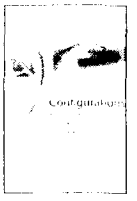

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SLF-14

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continued from page 7

Why have several novels by Milan Kundera lately been issued in new translations so inferior to earlier English-language versions that we no longer wish to teach these books to our students? Crain's article explains what has happened and confirms what we had only vaguely understood—that Kundera has been the primary source of the disaster that has befallen his books.

No doubt Kundera has received a quantity of bad advice on the matter and has been allowed to believe that infelicitous or misleading sentences in the new editions are not only acceptable but a clear advance over those provided earlier by first-rate writer-translators like Michael Henry Heim. But Crain's superb article makes it very clear that the responsibility lies largely with Kundera himself, a man in the grip of a disfiguring, obsessive desire to correct what had little need of wholesale correction.

ROBERT BOYERS
Tisch Professor of Arts and Letters
Skidmore College
Editor, Salmagundi

REPTILES REDUX

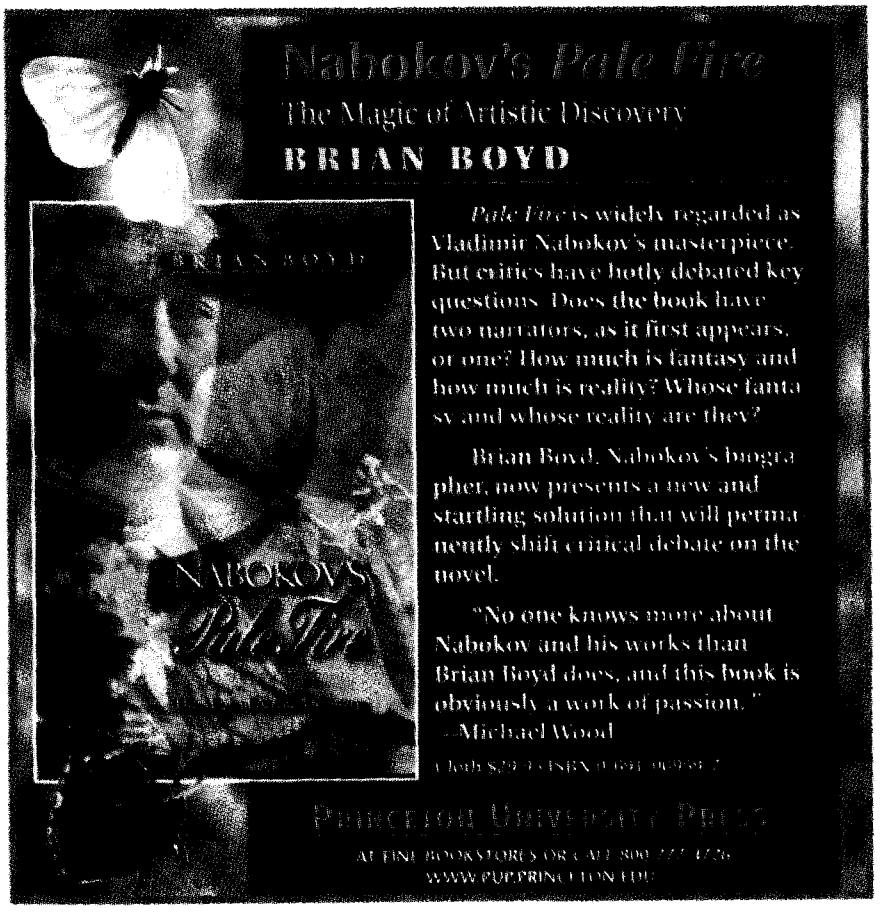
Paul Bravmann did a great job on what I've come to call the Little Lizard Controversy ["Leaping Lizards," Inside Publishing, October], but I worry that his story makes the controversy sound complicated and a little sinister. Basically, Christopher Austin just made a mistake. He used a current scientific debate about the origins of the Polynesians as a key part of his argument, but he got the debate wrong.

I am the authority Austin has cited to support his presentation of one side of this supposed debate. Yet I can say that neither I nor anybody I know thinks Polynesian settlement in the central and eastern Pacific took place gradually over an extended period of time from different populations in Melanesia. Additionally, there is no hypothesis about human colonization that I know of predicting that populations of the lizard he studied should be "paraphyletic" (have multiple origins) in Polynesia.

According to Bravmann, Austin evidently thinks I want to publish a rebuttal of his paper because I am angry with him. This is not the case. I simply can't figure out why anyone would refuse to correct a mistake once it is pointed out to him or her. I also can't figure out why *Nature* would publish a scientific paper based on a mistake.

If Austin can find anyone who has actually said what he says I have said about the settlement of Polynesia, I'd like him to introduce me to that person. Until he can do that, it seems inescapable to me that Austin either made a mistake (and has refused, for some reason, to correct it) or made up a scientific debate so he could "disprove" it. Since I'd rather not think the latter of anyone, and certainly not of any scientist, I now just wish Austin would apologize to me so that we can be done with the whole matter.

JOHN EDWARD TERRELL
Director, New Guinea Research Program
The Field Museum
Chicago, IL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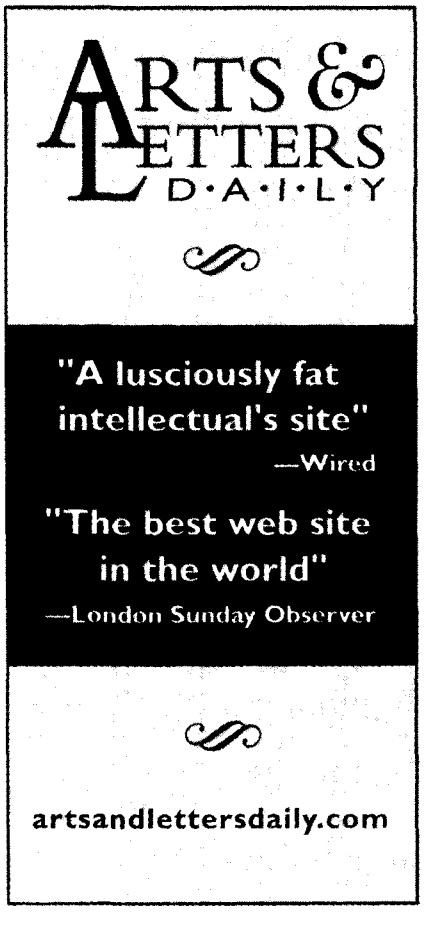

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CONFERENCES

BERLIN, BEIJING, AND BEYOND

"Berlin, Beijing, and Beyond: Cultural Politics Since 1989" is the theme of a conference at Cornell University on November 12–13 commemorating the tenth anniversaries of both the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Tian'anmen Square provocations in June of the same year. Focusing on Germany, China, and the United States, with some attention as well to other parts of the world, scholars from a range of areas of specialization will explore the implications of these two events for rethinking cultural politics at a time of accelerating globalization, as well as the post-1989 contexts, principles, goals, strategies, and effects of a variety of cultural practices. Among the questions the conference will address: What have been the effects of 1989 on how writers and artists conceive of their work? What is its legacy for the "literary" and for "cultural" production generally? What imaginative acts and acts of community does contemporary cultural politics have yet to engage? Conference organizer, Jonathan Monroe, Comparative Literature, administrative sponsors, Institute for German Cultural Studies. For further information: contact <jlm3@cornell.edu> or visit <www.arts.cornell.edu/...>

Ithaca, New York: November 12–13, 1999

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The 10th Annual Conference of the University of California, Riverside Philosophy Department presents "The Problem of Evil," an interdisciplinary exploration of the problem of evil. Included will be philosophical, theological, cinematic, and literary treatments of the issues. Presenters will include David Brandes and Harry Frankfurt, Princeton University; Jack Miles, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena; John Perry, Stanford University; Mike Ravizza; Eleonore Stump, St. Louis University; Michael Tooley, University of Colorado; Howard Wettstein, University of California, Riverside; Nicholas Wolterstorff, Yale Divinity School. Jack Miles is the author of the Pulitzer Prize winning book, *God: A Biography*. For conference information, please contact <Howard.Wettstein@ucr.edu> or <John.Fischer@ucr.edu> or check the conference web page at www.ucr.edu/Philosophy/conference00.html.

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SOUL SURVIVOR

THE LOGIC OF REINCARNATION

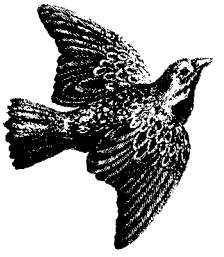
THE LATE CARL SAGAN ONCE asked the Dalai Lama what he would do if science were to cast doubt on a central tenet of Tibetan Buddhism—say, reincarnation. The Dalai Lama replied with a grin, "It's going to be hard to disprove reincarnation."

The doctrine of reincarnation is hardly peculiar to Buddhism. It is prominent in other Eastern religions as well as in some tropical African cultures. The Pythagoreans made reincarnation a part of their metaphysics; so did Plato (who argued that it accounted for our knowledge of the Forms) and, later, Schopenhauer. It has cropped up in certain Christian heresies and in Jewish Cabalism. In the United States today, more than a quarter of people surveyed say they believe in reincarnation—among them, presumably, some devotees of the late poet James Merrill.

Disproving reincarnation would clearly shake up a lot of worldviews. But is such a disproof as unimaginable as the Dalai Lama thinks? One might start with the simple observation that a century ago the world's population was well under two billion, whereas today it is six billion. As a matter of mathematical necessity, most people alive today cannot be re-embodied versions of people who died just before their birth.

Believers in reincarnation get around this demographic argument by surmising that the extra souls came from other species or from elsewhere in the universe or by allowing that new souls might be created. The important thing is that, once in existence, a soul is not destroyed by the death of a body it might inhabit.

But that raises a second objection to reincarnation. How can my self, which is so intimately bound up with the structures of my brain, survive its disintegration at death? The reincarnationists have a stock answer to this argument. The brain, they say, is like a radio. When it is damaged, the music becomes distorted. When it is smashed, the music stops altogether. But even then the radio waves are still out there to be received. A new radio can pick them up, provided it is tuned to the right frequency.



If reincarnation cannot be ruled out on empirical grounds, perhaps it can be discredited on a priori ones. Some philosophers have argued that the very idea of reincarnation is incoherent. If, for example, I seem to recall having fiddled while Rome burned, that does not mean I am Nero reborn. For me to *be* Nero, in this view, my body must be physically continuous with his; in other words, I would have to be Nero resurrected.

Many philosophers, however, do not insist on bodily identity as a necessary condition for personal identity. More influential is the Lockean view that psychological continuity—having the "same consciousness"—is enough. So it is at least conceptually possible that I might survive death by having my mental life, say, "downloaded" into a computer. Or lodged in a new body.

Let's turn the issue around, then. If it is hard to shake the faith of a believer in reincarnation, is it any easier to shake the disbelief of a skeptic? Suppose I say that *I*, for one, do not have any memories of past lives. The reincarnationist responds that death is a traumatic event and is therefore likely to cause amnesia.

Far more convincing would be the existence of people who possessed detailed knowledge of past lives—knowledge that would be inexplicable unless they had actually *lived* those lives. As it happens, Ian Stevenson, an eighty year old psychiatrist on the faculty of the University of Virginia, has been collecting just this sort of evidence for the last four decades. Underwritten by a million-dollar grant from the late Chester Carlson, the inventor of xerography, Stevenson has investigated close to three thousand cases of possible reincarnation on five continents. Recently, Tom Shroder, a *Washington Post* editor, accompanied Stevenson on field trips to Lebanon and India. Initially a skeptic about reincarnation, Shroder ended up writing a sympathetic account of the research titled *Old Souls: The Scientific Evidence for Past Lives* (Simon & Schuster, 1999).

What Stevenson goes around documenting are spontaneous, waking memories reported by small children that contain intimate details of the life of a deceased person—invariably one who died shortly before the birth of the child in question. In Lebanon, for example, a boy "remembers" being a twenty-five year-old mechanic thrown to his death in a car accident on a beach road near Beirut. Stevenson verifies the boy's knowledge of the name of the driver, the exact location of the crash, the names of the mechanic's family and friends, and many other details.

Stevenson's cases are uncanny at first blush, suggesting, if not reincarnation, at least ESP. But the evidence nearly always turns out to be contaminated by contact between the child's family and the family of the deceased before Stevenson arrived on the scene. Explanations involving self-deception, wish fulfillment, and fraud can never quite be excluded. And there is a deeper problem, one that I would call the ***reincarnation theorist's dilemma***. A "memory" of a past life is either checkable by an investigator or not. If the alleged memory is checkable, then the possibility cannot be ruled out that the "reborn" person came to learn of it through the same channels that the investigator subsequently uses to check it; if it is not checkable, then it is indistinguishable from fabulation and hence has no evidentiary value.

Neither the Dalai Lama's belief in reincarnation nor Carl Sagan's disbelief appears falsifiable. Does that mean both attitudes are equally unscientific?

JIM HOLT

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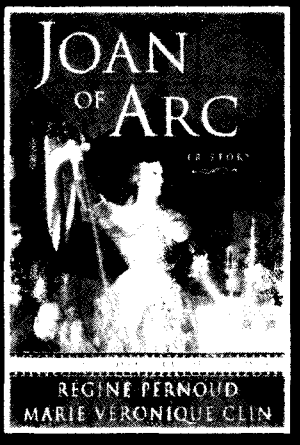

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